# INTRODUCTION

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This is the second Hebrew Bible volume of the Texts@Contexts series. Like its predecessor, *Genesis* (2010), it is arranged around several clusters of topics on which contributors comment from their different individual and communal contexts. Such contexts may be geographical, but they may also be social, economic, religious, secular, otherwise ideological, and so on. The issue at hand is to explore how reading the bible critically influences life at a certain location—"location" being understood in a broader sense than only geographical—while, at the same time, it is conditioned by the life experience of the reader.

## Exodus and Deuteronomy in One Volume—Why?

We have chosen to include essays on Exodus and Deuteronomy in one volume because of the many parallels between these two biblical books. Each one has the trope of a *journey* from Egypt to Canaan, a myth of becoming a nation through wanderings over the stereotypical time span of forty years, at its epicenter. The similarities are many, but so are the apparent differences in viewpoint, telling and retelling; both include reflections, in the forms of narrative and legal prescriptions, on issues of *leadership*; and both present materials that, for lack of a better term, can be called *laws*. Accordingly, these are the three clusters of topics in focus in this volume. That each of the two Torah books here discussed was written or compiled in a different context, in different frames of ideology, time, and place, is an agreed convention of biblical scholarship even if no agreement obtains as to their exact provenance. Historicity and historical investigation are not at the forefront of this volume,

which deals with biblical reception as it leads up to contemporary life and cultures in the twenty-first century. But even without the historical location being overtly at the center, treating the two books in one volume shows how context matters, not only for us in the here and now but also in antiquity, in retelling or [re]inventing the lives of individuals and of communities.

Putting Exodus and Deuteronomy together, side by side so to speak, affords different perspectives on similar events and issues. Each book, whatever the identity of its literary components, contains—when read as a whole—a specific focalization.[1] In Deuteronomy, the trope is having Moses as narrator and focalizer. In Exodus, focalization falls to several narrators in the text. Hereby some serious questions arise. Why retell the exodus myth twice, extensively, from two focal points at least, with both accounts celebrating Moses the optimal leader, the same Moses who is prominent in the Torah and in Joshua but almost absent from the rest of the bible (apart from some mentions in the prophetic and psalmic literature: see below under part 2)?[2] The double presentation, as well as the issues it raises, can in turn be a dual cluster of focalizations: from the perspective of the author, compiler, or editor, or from the readers' perspective. While a contextual interpretation may seem purely or nearly readerly rather than relating to investigations of matters authorial and editorial, it would seem from the articles in this volume that the fascination of bible scholars with authorial intent is, albeit diminished in recent decades, not altogether gone. Surprisingly, because many contextual readers, including the contextual readers gathered here, wish to justify their ideological and societal positions from the biblical texts; there is a mini-revival of interest in the texts' producers and in what "they" could have intended, so that contextual readings that diverge widely from one another can be upheld.

1. The technical terms "focalization," "focalize," "focalizer," and the like are here used in the sense developed by Mieke Bal, after Gérard Genette, in her book about narratology. The terms refer to the manner in which an author, or textual figure, variously direct and change their narrative viewpoint, thus directing and redirecting the reader's involvement in multiple facets of the plot, as it unfolds (Bal 2009[3]: 142–60, and elsewhere in the book). But see also the criticism of Bal later by Genette himself (1988: 76–78).

2. The author of this "Introduction" uses a lowercase first letter for "bible," "god," and "yhwh," as she does also in the Genesis volume of this series and in all her writings.

## Part One. Between Egypt and Canaan: To's and Fro's

In part 1, contributors focus on how communities organize their identities by telling stories, or myths, of immigration and resettlement and, perhaps, retracing their footsteps, as exemplified by the Torah exodus stories, and on how such communities reshape their interpretations of the Torah stories to fit their current needs. The essays presented here focus on African American (Kirk-Duggan and Coomber), African (Adamo and Ademiluka), Australian (Boer), Middle Eastern (Gendi and Brenner), and European (Larsson and Lipton) contexts. All but two essays are written from within the (post) Christian worlds; the other two are from two different Jewish worlds. Within part 1, as in later parts of this volume too, essays are grouped neither according to these broad parameters of community orientation nor according to contributors' locations but rather in a way that hopefully emphasizes their possible interconnectedness.

Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan opens this volume with her article, "How Liberating Is the Exodus and for Whom? Deconstructing Exodus Motifs in Scripture, Literature, and Life." She moves from describing her own early life as an African American, with a consideration of discrimination, oppression and liberation, to Exodus and the experiences recounted in it, with the concept of liberation and its opposite, slavery of every kind, at the center of her inquiry. After a brief look at the film *The Ten Commandments*, she discusses exodus motifs in two novels, John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and Margaret Walker's *Jubilee*. Having considered issues of poverty, oppression, violence, and visibility in these novels and in the biblical text of the exodus, Kirk-Duggan returns to the question how to use the troubling "liberation" texts as biotexts, texts to live by in dignity, equality and harmony, for all, rather than as texts that assist a biblically justified oppression of class, color, group, and so on.

Athalya Brenner, in "Territory and Identity: The Beginnings and Beyond," examines the seemingly paradoxical self-description of Israelites as concurrently and always the owners, by divine decree, of Canaan and of a symbolic Jerusalem as well as foreigners to the land they claim as theirs. Immigrations to and from the Promised Land signify this synchronic duality of home and diaspora existing side by side, when "home" (in the sense used also by Roland Boer: see below) is often elsewhere, at least on the symbolic level. The sojourn in Egypt as described in the bible is part of this literary

pattern, a pattern bound by place and time, which belongs to the identity formation of communities in the bible and beyond it.

In "'God's Perfectly Effected Purpose, or His Purposely Effected Neglect': Exodus and Wilderness in Australia," Roland Boer asserts: "It is conventional wisdom that the Exodus was a formative myth—appropriated, reshaped and often bowdlerized—for one colonial venture after another." The call to "Let my people go," to end the terrible oppression of Israel (that would also cancel out the fleshpots, lentils, leeks, and cucumbers, as Boer shrewdly reminds us) in favor of a land flowing with milk and honey, does not always produce the wished-for results. Patterns of conquest, violence, appropriation, and cruelty are in evidence, as well as the concepts of exile and wilderness as unblessed spaces. From here Boer commences to describe the dualistic attitudes of originally allochthonous[3] Australians regarding their target country and their source country, with a longing for the "old country" (see also Diana Lipton's essay) that can make it seem as much an Eden as the Promised country, and is more mythical than anchored in reality.

Magdi S. Gendi is a Christian Egyptian academic, hence by definition he belongs to a minority in his own country, with unique difficulties reading the stories of liberation from Egypt. Identification with the Israelites against the Egyptians, as symbolized by their chief the pharaoh, is invited by the biblical text; but what about the reader's contextualized self-identity? In his "Pharaoh as a Character in the Exodus Narrative: An Egyptian Perspective," Gendi begins by recounting that, in the Egyptian protests of January 2011, when President Mubarak was called to step down (which he eventually had to do), the protesters began to call the President "the new pharaoh." In Gendi's own words, "as an Egyptian, on the one hand I have the Egyptian blood of those great grandparents who suffered from the king of Egypt. On the other hand, as a Christian, a descendant of the people of God whose great grandparents

3. *Allochtoon* is a Dutch word (derived from Greek *allos*, other, and *chthon* earth/land, literally meaning "originating from another country." It is the opposite of the Greek *auto*, self, literally meaning "originating from this country." In the Netherlands (and Flanders), the term *allochtoon* is widely used to refer to immigrants and their descendants. The derived English term is here used not only because of the Introduction's author part-context in the Netherlands, but also because of its more precise connotation in Dutch culture. Officially the term *allochtoon* is much more specific and refers to anyone of whom one or both of his/her parents was not born in the Netherlands, thus its meaning goes beyond just being not originally native to the land. See further in the essay.

were oppressed by the king of Egypt, I am not surprised by the Egyptian proverb, 'We thought that he was going to be Moses, but he turned out to be Pharaoh.' With this proverb, Egyptians distance themselves from the king of Egypt of the Exodus narrative. No wonder, then, that the protesters in Egypt have been naming the former President of Egypt 'the pharaoh of the twenty-first century.'" To which I can add that a popular saying in Israel, also a line from a song by the late popular singer Meir Ariel, is a self-encouragement in the face of danger: "We have weathered the pharaoh, we shall weather this (danger) too." It would seem that, culturally, it remains easier to identify with the Egyptians of the exodus, the ones who received and carried out orders and suffered plagues and died because of that, than with their figurehead who dispensed the orders.

David Tuesday Adamo wishes to reclaim an African heritage and even an African origin for biblical figures and events, which for him is an ongoing project. In his essay, "A Mixed Multitude: An African Reading of Exodus 12:38," the designation "mixed multitude" given to the group(s) that allegedly accompany the Israelites out of Egypt is examined beyond its simple understanding as a "mixture" or "riffraff" of multiple descent. From a linguistic discussion Adamo proceeds to consider the historicity of the exodus narrative according to secondary literature as well as Egyptian documents of the mid-second millennium BCE, both necessary to his project of showing that groups of people from Western Asia, north Africa (Egypt), and sub-Sahara Africa moved in and out of Egypt at those times. From those considerations he concludes that a long sojourn in Egypt would have allowed any group to adopt African daily customs and general culture, so that the "mixed multitude," and even the emergent Israel, were in effect culturally, if not always ethnically, Africans when they were let go.

In his essay, "In Search of Children's Agency: Reading Exodus from a Swedish Perspective," Mikael Larsson uses attitudes toward children in Exodus and elsewhere in the Torah, especially in Genesis, as a lens to understand Exodus in his own context, and to understand his context in light of Scandinavian practices including Church of Sweden educational practices and the work of influential Danish psychologists on child rearing. Larsson looks for children's agency according to definitions of children and their rights used by the United Nations, then reviews depictions of children and especially the way they are gendered in the bible; he then traces children's, especially

sons', place vis-à-vis their parents, especially fathers. He concludes: "Despite the many revolutionary changes in the material life conditions of children, alarmingly many figures of thought remain the same. What is the difference between the children of Israel's triumphant parade with Egyptian booty and today's display of children as expensive accessories to their parents' life projects? The work to bridge the gap between the ideals of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child and the social reality of children continues."

Diana Lipton, in "Longing for Egypt: Dissecting the Heart Enticed," contextualizes herself as well as her recently published book *Longing for Egypt and Other Unexpected Biblical Tales* (2008). Her essay here relates to the book's first chapter, "The Heart Enticed: The Exodus from Egypt as a Response to Assimilation." Lipton begins with the paradox that Egypt is both a place of servitude to escape from *and* a space to long for (see also Boer's essay). In the opening chapter of her book, she views Exodus as a document of resistance to an *internal* threat instead of the record of liberation from an external one. She claims that "freedom from oppressive slavery and persecution . . . are not the central concerns of the Exodus narrative, and where they do occur, they function primarily to separate Israel from Egypt." Her essay here is a tour de force of contextualization, a description of the road she has taken toward a personal and personalized understanding of the exodus that is nevertheless thoroughly grounded in a communal background.

Solomon Olusola Ademiluka, in "The Relevance of the Jewish Passover for Christianity in Africa," reminds us that the Jewish annual festival of Passover/Pesach is still being observed today by most Jews in the world The interest of his study is to identify possible historical and sociocultural values common to Pesach and to African annual festivals, thereby creating a crossover for evaluating the relevance of the Jewish festival for Christianity in Africa. In his opinion, in both the Jewish and African contexts the relevant festivals serve the preservation of valued cultural heritage. Hence, rather than forsake their culture, African Christians should be encouraged to participate in their traditional festivals so long as the festivals do not contradict the essence of the gospel. According to him, this is one of the ways by which Africans can retain their historical and cultural identity while constructing for themselves a new and suitable theology.

Matthew J. M. Coomber, in "Before Crossing the Jordan," analyzes how the biblical exodus was interpreted and utilized within African-American

communities as its interpretations and uses evolved from the nineteenth-century anti-slavery movement to the mid-twentieth-century struggle of African Americans for civil rights and asks how effective those interpretations were as tools for social change. In his study Coomber shows how the use of the exodus narratives by African American communities empowered them in their struggle to lift their social oppression as a racial group. Through such uses they managed not only to "change their own circumstances, but the norms and laws of the society in which they lived. Through summoning hope, meaning, and stamina to sustain a people who faced violent resistance in their struggle against powerful racist institutions, African Americans were able to effectively draw upon the Exodus narrative to reinterpret their history and alter their futures in two different centuries."

## Part Two. Leadership: Moses and Miriam

Moses is undoubtedly the most prominent male leader, archetypal and optimal, in Exodus and especially in Deuteronomy, which is presented as a long speech he delivers just prior to his death (and which includes a narration of his death in the last chapter). In Leviticus and Numbers, his brother Aaron will come into a high position in his own right, but on the whole will not surpass Moses even there. Moses is one of only three males in the Torah that have a biography extending from before his birth until his death and burial, the others being Joseph and Jacob/Israel. (Another *vita* is that of Samson, in Judges 13–16.) But unlike Joseph, Jacob/Israel and Aaron, Moses hardly has an afterlife beyond the Torah and Joshua. A few statistics are perhaps in order here. In the Torah, from Exodus to the end of Deuteronomy, Moses is named almost six hundred times. In Joshua to the end of 2 Kings, that is, within the Deuteronomistic editorial framework, he is named less than 100 times, mostly in Joshua. In the prophetic books, he is named five times all in all, twice in one chapter of Isaiah (Isa. 63:11,12; Jer. 15:1; Mic. 6:4; Mal. 3.22). In the Psalms, Moses features eight times, four of these in Ps. 105 and 106, which record a view of yhwh's salvation history with Israel. Even in the Passover Haggadah, Moses is mentioned only once; his role is so minimized that the central midrash there insists that god himself performed all the miracles of the plagues and the crossing of the sea and the exodus, with no messengers involved in the performance. It is also worth noting that Moses

and Aaron are missing from the exodus and plague account of Ps. 78. This contrast, almost a discrepancy, makes Moses an extremely interesting figure for midrashists, believers and scholars.

Equally intriguing is Miriam's figure. Traditionally Miriam is identified as Moses' saving sister, although in Exodus 2 the sister is nameless, and in Exod. 15:21 she is defined as Aaron's sister. Her role as singer/dancer and leader of women, at least in Exodus 15; her conflict with Moses on a marital issue as well as regarding leadership in Numbers 12 (for which she is punished more severely than her brother and co-contender for leadership, Aaron); and the mention of her death all serve to enhance our feeling that the figure of Miriam is the only female contender for leadership in the exodus narratives: a losing contender, suppressed perhaps beyond recognition, but a contender nevertheless.

One essay in part 2, that by Sonia Kwok Wong, explores Moses and another (by Joseph Kelly) refers to definitions of prophecy in "his" book, Deuteronomy. Another essay explores Miriam (Naomi Graetz) and another, Moses and Miriam (Angeline Song). The contributors' socio-geographical contexts are post-British Hong Kong, Israel, the United States, and Singapore and New Zealand, respectively.

Sonia Kwok Wong's "The Birth, Early Life, and Commission of Moses" is "a reading from post-handover Hong Kong." Her basic premises are two: that Hong Kong people have a unique hybrid identity by comparison to mainland Chinese, fostered by their postcolonial history until recently; and that Moses, because of being reared both in his so called "primordial identity" and in his adopted colonial identity, has a hybrid identity himself. Wong contends that it is precisely this hybrid identity of Moses, uneasily resolved after he is called to his office, that makes him uniquely suitable for his vocation. Her own postcolonial hybrid identity, self-confessed, makes it possible for her to read Moses in this light; and Moses' story, as she reads it, has consequences for the identity of the Hong Kong people, caught between past British colonialism (often viewed as politically, socially, and economically beneficial) and present and future connections with mainland China.

Naomi Graetz's "Miriam and Me" is a personal story of the author's decade long preoccupation and relationship with the Miriam figure, for better and for worse. Graetz describes how she has in turn wrestled with, accepted, reimagined, redefined, and rethought Miriam by reading Jewish

midrash about her and by writing neo-midrash to supplement the lacks she perceived in the biblical narrative and the midrashim. In this fascinating journey, Graetz discovered and rediscovered herself as well as Miriam, who served as her "alter ego" in many life situations and stations. For Graetz, Miriam has a substantial afterlife, even though her literary life in the bible and Midrash is scanty and fragmented, not least because of the literary activities of Graetz herself. This essay gives a glimpse into similar neo-midrashic activities undertaken by contemporary Jewish women in order to supplement ancient male midrash and empower themselves in a biased religious environment, however advanced it may be in less formally orthodox Jewish congregations and communities.

Angeline Song, in her "Imaging Moses and Miriam Re-Imaged: Through the Empathetic Looking Glass of a Singaporean *Peranakan* Woman," defines herself as a native Singaporean (*Peranakan)* woman, an adoptee who grew up in Singapore but later emigrated to New Zealand, uses her life experiences to look at Moses and Miriam through a "hermeneutic of empathy." As a person whose adoption probably saved her life, as a person who grew up under the influence of colonialism, and as a member of a certain class, she can see how Moses' adoption worked for him. Although she does not use the term, she, like Wong, sees Moses as having a hybrid, composite, and also confused identity. As a woman of a certain social origin and class, she can reevaluate Miriam, the tactics attributed to her, and her literary fate. Song ends her contribution by querying the Promised Land concept as applied not communally but individually—to Moses, to Miriam, and to herself.

Joseph Kelly, in "What Would Moses Do? On Applying the Test of a False Prophet to the Current Climate Crisis," begins with the current heated controversy over global warming: Is it a fact, can it be denied, what are the predictions for the near and distant future? Both believers and deniers indulge in heated prophecies and forecasts. In Deut. 18:15 Moses is reported as saying, "The LORD your god will raise up for you a prophet from among your own people, like myself; him you shall heed" (JPS), and there follow definitions of the true prophet, especially as set out in 18:22. Kelly discusses Moses' definition by juxtaposing it with Elijah and Micaiah, among others, and with Moses' own figure as an exemplary prophet as strongly implied by the location and wording of the passage. Kelly suggests that refutation or eventual "fulfillment" of prophecy and counter-prophecy are hardly the

issue, either in the bible or now. Rather, he points to skepticism, repentance, and listening to informed authority as criteria for dealing with prophecies and forecasts.

## Part Three. Laws and Norms: For Whom and for What?

Social identity cannot be achieved without the cohesive force of new norms and laws. It is therefore hardly surprising that the myths of Israel's origin as a nation include in their center a theophanic, divinely ordained set of general and particular laws, in more than one version, with duplications and, at times, conflicts.

The essays in part 3 are arranged from the general to the particular, with a strong initial accent on matters of gender and gender-related violence, then a return to more general matters of economy and class that make for a just or less just society, whether utopically or in praxis. The essays come from Israel (Athalya Brenner), Brazil (Fernando Candido da Silva), England (Sandra Jacobs), America (Cheryl Kirk-Duggan), Finland (Kari Latvus), and Sudan/United States (Mende Nazer and Bernadette Brootten). The viewpoints are mixed, with a Muslim viewpoint introduced in the last piece featuring Nazer.

Athalya Brenner, in "The Decalogue—Am I an Addressee?" returns to the gender question inherent in the biblical formulation of the decalogue. Hebrew distinguishes between grammatical female and male verbs, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and numbers. The addressees of the Ten Commandments are males, the "sons [sic] of Israel." Females, whenever they are mentioned during the Sinai theophany or prior to it, are mostly objects, not agents or subjects. The current practice of bible translations is to present contemporary readers, sensitized to gender issues, with inclusive language that blurs the biblical gender bias. This has the effect of promoting present gender equality, no doubt, and of facilitating the continuing habit of looking to the bible in general and the Decalogue in particular as a universal model for ethics. However, this comes at the price of falsifying the biblical text. Biblical bias, Brenner concludes, should be exposed and pronounced unsuitable, not made vague by good intentions.

Fernando Candido da Silva, in "An Abominable and Perverted Alliance? Toward a Latin-American Queer Communitarian Reading of Deuteronomy," begins by analyzing the Latin-American modes of reading the bible along liberation theology lines, then moves to liberative readings of Deuteronomy.

Here, he writes, "the emphasis lies on the struggle/reaction against oppressive practices in favor of a (new) familial economy and solidarity. All of life's contradictions are, so to say, swept under the rug, and what we have left is the romanticized activation of the exodus's communitarian memory and also of the 'egalitarian' pre-monarchical tribal society." He then proposes other ways of understanding ideas of alliances in Deuteronomy, especially with regard to the status of those considered "abhorrent"—which he renders intentionally and ironically as "perverted"—to the Hebrew god and his community. Writing from a theoretical and personal queer place, anchored in his location (Sao Paulo, Brazil), Candido da Silva looks for ways of forming new alliances of the so-called normative with the so-called abominable and perverted communities, and for adapting them to Deuteronomy, as well as adapting his newly read Deuteronomy to his own life.

Sandra Jacobs, in "Terms of Endearment?" discusses the curious case of the "desirable female captive" and her "illicit acquisition" in Deut. 21:10-14. The title is informative: Jacobs sees the female captive as a victim. In her reading of the biblical text, she emphasizes that concern for the physical or emotional injury or well being of the victim remains absent; the procedure described for marrying such a captive after certain actions are taken is designed, at least implicitly, with the interests of Israelite males in mind. Jacobs, an observant Jew, is especially interested in biblical law, attitudes to women, and violence against them, together with the contradictions inherent in rabbinic Judaism in its interpretations of foreign captives and slaves. She adduced rabbinic and medieval commentators, as well as ancient near eastern parallels, and ties up the rape/marriage of the desirable captive (not necessarily a virgin!) and the rituals linked to it with, among other things, Spartan marriage practices and the need somehow to regulate Israelite men's liaisons with foreign women, especially during times of war. In any case, as Jacobs makes quite clear, the woman is male property. The treatment of this slave stands in contrast therefore to the slaves in Egypt and to humanitarian sentiments interspersed in Deuteronomy and in rabbinic literature.

Cheryl Kirk-Duggan continues the theme of the captive woman but extends it to include domestic violence against other classes of women and other social inferiors in her second contribution to this volume, "Precious Memories: Rule of Law in Deuteronomy as Catalyst and Contradiction of Domestic Violence." She uses her womanist perspective to view film and opera and, through those, to explore Deuteronomy texts that focus on

oppression of several socially inferior classes. After stating her own contextual stance, Kirk-Duggan provides contextual information about domestic violence, then examines statistics about domestic violence. Her next step is an interpretation of Deuteronomistic laws or scenarios that are supportive of domestic violence: marrying a captive woman (compare Jacobs's essay); the case of the rebellious son (Deut. 21); and marriage violations and rape (Deut. 22). Her next move is to explore characteristics of domestic violence in film—*The Burning Bed, Woman Thou Art Loosed,* and *Precious*—and contemporary opera, the adaptation of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* by composer Andrew Earle Simpson and librettist Sarah Brown Ferrario. Finally, Kirk-Duggan sets the bible, film, and Oprah in dialogue in order to find ways for changing what she calls the "upside-down tea party" and to work "toward justice in domestic violence."

Kari Latvus describes his essay, "Debt and Interest in the Hebrew Bible," as an experiment in intercontextuality. He juxtaposes two clusters of texts related to debt and poverty, the latter either caused by or causing debt. One cluster is ancient and biblical, including Exod. 22:25-26; Deut. 15:1-11 and 23:19-20; and Lev. 25:1-12, 35-55. The other is contemporary: a collection of 278 letters of indebted Finnish persons collected in 2000 and read under the auspices of the church. Latvus is particularly interested in the methodology that should be used for comparing such disparate documents. Thus, he write, his essay "is a *prelude* to the comparison, and also works as preliminary report for the journey to be finished in the future." An important point he raises is that the biblical texts discussed focus on the haves, not the have-nots. The law texts do not refer to possible emotions of the indebted, such as depression, hopelessness, fear, and powerlessness, which are often mentioned in the Finnish stories. "Although the biblical authors do not describe the outer or inner world of the poor, this does not mean that the poor were happy, calm, and healthy. On the contrary, the opposite reality, illustrated in the letters of the current poor, seems to be much closer to reality." In that sense, one important motive for the intercontextual comparison, in spite of the obvious dissimilarities, is that the ancient and contemporary texts can be read as *complementary.*

The last essay in part 3, and this book, is an interview—a dialogue, not a conventional essay—between Mende Nazer and Bernadette Brooten. As a young Muslim girl in the Sudan, Mende Nazer was sold into slavery. Unlike many others in her situation, she eventually managed to escape when sent

to be a slave in London. Bernadette Brooten, who runs the Feminist Sexual Ethics Program at Brandeis University, invited Nazer to the project in order to promote work against slavery and scholarly understanding of it as a current phenomenon. Articles that grew out of that project were published under the title *Beyond Slavery: Overcoming Its Religious and Sexual Legacies* (2010). The interview reproduced here under the title "Slavery and 'Beyond Slavery'" is a slightly modified version of an interview published in that book. It is truly noteworthy for many reasons, one of which is the inner strength that guided Nazer's survival and escape; another, her firsthand views of what slavery is like. Read and be the judge.

"We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt"—taken from Deut. 15:15, 16:12—is one of the first sentences in the Pesach *Haggada* and Jewish home ritual. It is closely followed by its antidote: "Now we are liberated" (literally: "sons of freedom"). At the end of this volume, it remains clear that some biblical social maladies are still with us. Slavery, of individuals and of communities, is not universally abolished. Discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, class, disabilities, and economic capacity—to name but a few grounds—is still practiced today, at times legitimated by claims regarding the "originally intended" meaning of biblical texts, at times justified by reading against their grain. Liberation, or its opposite, are in the eye of the reader.

## Postscript

As this Introduction was written, it was Passover again, in 2011—or the year 5771 in the traditional Jewish calculation from the creation of the world, as in Genesis 1. It was springtime, as in the Song of Songs, which is traditionally read at home after the Passover Seder, or in the synagogue on Passover weekend, according to the custom of different communities. I was driving with a friend along the Northern Israeli countryside, enjoying the sights and smells and sounds of spring, some of which are already mentioned in the bible (Song of Songs and elsewhere), and listening to the car radio. On the hour, a new program began on the classical music channel: a program of so-called "spirituals," utilizing the biblical themes of exodus and liberation. The songs were sung by male and female singers and versions were compared and discussed. The highlight of the show, of course, was Paul Robeson's rendering of "Let My People Go!"

This occurrence, as banal as it may seem, was for me a source of reflection, in general and in particular, about this volume. The spirituals were allotted to male and female voices and the performances of the same lyrics, the same music, were of course similar yet different. These songs have attained a classical status in a context far removed from their original, symbolic, anti-slavery struggle. They were broadcast in Israel to celebrate the Jewish Passover, far away from their original place of origin and their source religion and their original singers. And yet, the paradox of the cultural mix and contemporary globalization is that the message remains powerful and succinct: Let My People Go, indeed!