

# New Approaches to Religion and Power

Series Editor  
Joerg Rieger  
Vanderbilt University  
Nashville, TN, USA

While the relationship of religion and power is a perennial topic, it only continues to grow in importance and scope in our increasingly globalized and diverse world. Religion, on a global scale, has openly joined power struggles, often in support of the powers that be. But at the same time, religion has made major contributions to resistance movements. In this context, current methods in the study of religion and theology have created a deeper awareness of the issue of power: Critical theory, cultural studies, postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, feminist theory, critical race theory, and working class studies are contributing to a new quality of study in the field. This series is a place for both studies of particular problems in the relation of religion and power as well as for more general interpretations of this relation. It undergirds the growing recognition that religion can no longer be studied without the study of power.

For Further information and to submit a proposal for consideration, please contact Senior Editor Philip Getz, [phil.getz@palgrave-usa.com](mailto:phil.getz@palgrave-usa.com)

More information about this series at  
<https://link.springer.com/bookseries/14754>

Silvana Rabinovich

# Biblical Figures in Israel's Colonial Political Theology

Translated by Gabriela Lea Wolochwianski

palgrave  
macmillan

Silvana Rabinovich  
Instituto de Investigaciones Filológica, Ciudad Universitaria  
Coyoacán, Mexico

*Translated by*  
Gabriela Lea Wolochwianski  
Rosario, Santa Fé, Argentina

ISSN 2634-6079 ISSN 2634-6087 (electronic)  
New Approaches to Religion and Power  
ISBN 978-3-031-03821-1 ISBN 978-3-031-03822-8 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-03822-8>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: World History Archive / Alamy Stock Photo

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

*To my grandfather, Wolf Kaufman, who taught me to read the Torah with  
a smile full of pain.*

*To my father, Carlos Rabinovich, who bequeathed to me my stubborn quest  
for justice.*

*To my children, Theo and Emma, to whom I bequeath—without losing my  
smile—the same ethical and political passion.*

*To Federico, a necessary interlocutor in the trans-generational transmission.*

*To Omar, whose name is a nest of love, a promise of peace.*

## PREFACE: VOW OF OBSOLESCENCE

When you publish a book, you usually wish for it to remain topical. This is not the case with this book. Strangely enough, I hope that its contents become part of a perished past. I hope this book remains as a testimony of an obsolete nightmare of the biblical language. I hope that one day it will be read as a curiosity, a false step, a detour of a language that could swiftly revert back to its course and recognize itself as inspiring translation.

I started writing this book in 2010. Since then, more and more facts have been added. The banality of evil is growing. I am shocked at the news about the use of biblical angel figures to name pieces of the death and espionage industry in Israel: *Seraph* is the name of a surveillance system, a missile and a bunker are named after *Gabriel*, *Raphael* is the acronym for Authority for the Development of Armaments (*Rashut lePituach Emtza'ei Lechimah*)...<sup>1</sup>

After confirming the worsening of the state of exception in Palestine/Israel again and again, I recall Walter Benjamin and the organization of pessimism.

During these years, I have been honored by the friendship of two life teachers, among many other valuable friends: Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin

<sup>1</sup>“In the ISDEF exposition hall—also advertised on the convention floor was Israel Aerospace Industries’ Gabriel missile; Mifram Security’s mobile Gabriel shelter; and Seraphim Optronics’ semi-manned surveillance systems, named for archangels Gabriel, Raphael, and Ariel.” Sophia Goodfriend, “Naked Gun” (*Jewish Currents*, December 5, 2019), about the group *Alpha Gun Angels*, comprised of models who are Israeli Army veterans and who promote weapons and a militarist way of life, especially in social media: <https://jewishcurrents.org/naked-gun/>. Accessed May 25, 2021.

(Nono) and Ronit Chacham. Nono brought Mahmoud Darwish's "The 'Red Indian's' Penultimate Speech to the White Man" to Mexico. During these years, thanks to Shadi Rohana and a wonderful group of "heteronomers," we started sowing hospitality in the language by translating this powerful poem into Spanish, in order to enable its continuous multilingual translation into the indigenous languages of the continent (and beyond). This book is inspired by that poem.

I also met Palestinians and Israelis who stubbornly and humbly strive for peace with justice. The biologist Mazin Qumsiyeh at Bethlehem University, for instance, *translates* permaculture into politics. I found peoples of the desert, nomadic peoples forced to stop in front of shameful walls. In the meantime, the *Nakbah* turned 70, the same number as the faces of the Torah, according to the wise.

Coyoacán, Mexico  
May 1, 2019

Silvana Rabinovich

## PRELIMINARY NOTE: ABOUT THE METHODOLOGY OF THIS BOOK

The research method used in writing this book is focused on language within the framework of the *heteronomous* Levinasian ethics, which prioritizes listening to the Other. It is characterized by the “otherwise than knowledge” approach that does not intend to comprehend knowledge in the form of information but rather to enact hospitality in the language. In this *heteronomous* method, various elements inspired by Walter Benjamin’s ideas of justice converge, namely:

- (a) Remembrance (*Eingedenken*), which responds to a call from the “past” that persists in the now-time (*Jetztzeit*). In the case of this book, it is applied to the use of biblical figures in modern Hebrew political discourse;
- (b) Montage, which resorts to constellations of meanings (and of language functions), with poetics as a meaning enhancer. Collage of texts and readings of different times that resound and *constellate* like *Denkbilders*. Meaningful interstitial spaces are conceived as fertile land for hopeful thought. I present various forms of expression, images, poems, voices, readings, and comments.

I position myself in the Bakhtinian dialogic path, with its polyphonic expression, which I have found to be very well developed in the traditional biblical exegesis (*parshanut*) and paradigmatically, in the Talmud. Dialogism, the primary approach to my work method, is highly influenced by Buber’s ethics and politics. The figure of *translation* in the



philosophical sense of the term extends across the whole book. Among my sources, I place my training as a Hebrew teacher. I learned the language as a child through my grandfather. I also taught the Hebrew Bible at various levels of education for ten years. Additionally, my academic and research works on philosophy are complemented by my field work as an application of the heteronomous ethics of the justice *of* the other. In this framework, I visited Palestine/Israel several times in the last few years. I also lived and studied in Israel for a total of five years. Apart from bibliographic and hemerographic sources, I was nurtured by long conversations with friends on both sides of the wall and participated in many seminars and workshops in different locations. I have studied Arabic for several years and this enabled me to access other sources and encouraged me to explore other ways of acquiring knowledge.

In a nutshell, the heteronomous work method employed in these pages invokes Emmanuel Levinas, Walter Benjamin, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Martin Buber. This book does not claim to say everything. It offers neither the first nor the last word about a painful situation that has been going on for generations, a situation in which I am deeply involved. I learned a gesture from Spanish artist Isidro López Aparicio which I try to adapt into my writing: I take advantage of the cracks in the wall—the wall can be considered as a materialization of the discourse of hate—and I inject water drops in the form of loved prophetic words with highly critical potential. When the drops turn into ice and manifest their radicalism, they patiently wait for the stone to break, that is, to open the raging ears and listen to the justice *of* the other.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Omar Arach, Federico Donner, Rubén Chababo, and Eliezer Budasoff for their patient, free, and attentive readings and I would also like to thank my dear teacher Enrique Dussel and Ramón Grosfoguel, because they found lodging for the original text of this nomadic book at IEPALA-Editorial. They were sensitive enough to perceive that love is the ink running on these pages. In this new edition, revised, updated, and enlarged I would also like to thank my Israeli and Palestinian friends who have the courage of thinking about the justice *of* the other without fear. I thank Shadi Rohana, Husni Abdel Wahed, Jessica Nevo, Linda Dar Issa, Mazin Qumsiyeh, Sigal Ron, and Kassim Alsraiha, for having opened doors and windows. I am grateful for the affection of my dear friend Hiyam and my beloved nephew Dan. I thank my life teachers: Nono (Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin), Ronit Chacham, Hannah Safran. I am grateful for the generous reading of the book by Santiago Slabodsky, as well as for the bravery of Palgrave Macmillan for letting this book—conceived between my mother-tongue (Spanish) and my archi-mother tongue (Hebrew) and born in my hometown—be reborn in English, translated by my soul sister: Gabriela Wolochwianski. And again, I thank Enrique Dussel, whose teachings over the years have proved to be infinite.

## Praise for *Biblical Figures in Israel's Colonial Political Theology*

“*Biblical Figures* provides a detailed and illuminating study of the ways in which the Zionist discourse uses the biblical text to justify colonial dispossession and oppression. This critique is accompanied with an inspiring attempt to release the Bible from its colonial uses, and proposes a decolonial reading based on insightful engagement with Jewish and Palestinian thinkers”

—Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin – Historian. *Ben Gurion University*

“This fine work by the Jewish Latin American philosopher Silvana Rabinovich was written with intelligence, clarity, knowledge of the subject matter, and utmost courage. She undertakes a deep analysis of the « pathologies of the state ». A dangerous approach indeed, especially for a Jewish thinker who is profoundly aware of this tradition and knows that the greatest prophets of ancient Israel were persecuted for their criticisms of the « sins of Israel ». The beauty of the book lies in its coincidences with Latin American ideas of liberation. This is a magnificent book, I insist: brave, intelligent, original. I was its first reader and I devoured it instantly and passionately.”

—Enrique Dussel – Philosopher of Liberation. *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa*

““Biblical Figures....” is a thoughtful, insightful and socially-committed South-South Conversation. Rabinovich, a leading Argentinian-Mexican Jewish philosopher, crosses hermetic borders to challenge discursive complicities with colonial projects. When others dwell in partial representations of the present, she reimagines other dialogues that both come to terms with our own responsibilities and start building a transmodern world beyond coloniality. This is a must read for everyone interested in Jewish thought, Decolonial theory, Israel/Palestine studies, South-South conversations, and Political and Liberationist Theologies and Philosophies.”

—Santiago Slabodsky – *Kaufman Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies at Hofstra University-New York*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> (Santiago Slabodsky holds the Kaufman Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies at Hofstra University-New York and is the 2017 Caribbean Philosophical Association Frantz Fanon Outstanding Book Awardee for Decolonial Judaism.)

“Rabinovich’s collection of essays is an invitation for a de-colonial reading of the Bible based on a deep commitment to translation and radical poetics and thinking. Through her mastery of the Bible, Rabinovich writes a counter narrative that involves the Palestinians as co-actors rather than the dehumanized Other. This is innovative, subversive, and courageous.”

—Amal Equeiq, Assistant Professor of Arabic Studies and Comparative Literature,  
*Williams College*

# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction: A <i>Promised Land</i>: To Bury God? (About Uses and Abuses of Hebrew Bible)</b>	<b>1</b>
	<i>Declared as a Manifesto</i>	5
	<i>Read Biblically</i>	8
	<i>Thinking Genealogically</i>	11
<b>2</b>	<b>The Language: A Reservoir for Complicity</b>	<b>17</b>
	<i>Language and War</i>	24
	<i>Shem's Languages</i>	29
	<i>Translation Crossovers: Languages' Promises</i>	32
<b>3</b>	<b>Dangerous Brotherhoods. Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and His Brothers</b>	<b>35</b>
	<i>...that Woman's son will never share in the Inheritance with My son Isaac</i>	38
	<i>...He took away My birthright, and behold, now He has taken away My blessing...</i>	43
	<i>...Come, and let Us sell Him to the Ishmaelites, and let not Our hand be upon Him; for He is Our brother and Our flesh</i>	47
	<i>The Brother, Will He Always Be the Enemy?</i>	50
<b>4</b>	<b>Committing Suicide with the Enemy: The Specter of Samson</b>	<b>55</b>

<b>5</b>	<b>Victims and Victimizers 1: The Bible and the <i>Shoah</i></b>	<b>69</b>
	<i>Of Victims and Sacrifices</i>	71
	<i>Victims and/or Victimizers</i>	74
	<i>Take now thy son, (...) and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering</i>	81
<b>6</b>	<b>Victims and Victimizers 2: Amalek, the Canaanites, and the <i>Nakbah</i></b>	<b>87</b>
	<i>A Land Without a People?</i>	88
	<i>Thou Shalt Not Forget to Erase Its Remembrance: The Specter of Amalek</i>	94
	<i>Appendix: Omnipotent-Impotent: The Exiled as a Threat. Biblical Snapshots</i>	103
<b>7</b>	<b>Organizing Pessimism (In Conclusion)</b>	<b>115</b>
	<i>The Entrapped Peace: Ethics and Politics</i>	117
	<i>The Logic of the Same and Identity: Nation and Death... (Zionist Apocalyptica)</i>	118
	<i>The Spectral Ethics of the Other: Politics of Otherness in the Mirror of Language</i>	122
	<i>Palestine-Israel: Ethics and Politics in Poetic Crossroads</i>	125
<b>8</b>	<b>Epilogue. Arendt with Illich: <i>Corruptio optimi quae est pessima</i></b>	<b>137</b>
	<b>Index</b>	<b>149</b>