

STARING DOWN THE VIOLENCE: SURVEILLANCE IN GENESIS

Carolyn Alsen
Whitley College, University of Divinity

ABSTRACT

This article advances the hypothesis that surveillance studies can inform a postcolonial feminist reading of Genesis narratives. The method of reading uses the overall metaphor of the omnividence (the ability to see all) of the few acting upon the many. Of particular use in this study are literary poetics, ethnic and gender profiling, assemblage and data doubles, shame and honour, and a reimagining of the “omniscient” third person narrator. Persian and Assyrian period intelligence gathering and surveillance is investigated as an influence on the text. That is, the narrator and characters report events after seeing them through a particular nationalistic and legal ideological lens. In one account of narrative surveillance in the story of Dinah and Shechem, in Gen 34, the narrator demonstrates bias. To counter-read this, sousveillance techniques in the narrative can be understood as not only a means of profiling but also a means of resisting this profiling. Drawing on the practical theology of Eric Stoddart, cultural theory and postcolonial feminist thinking, resistance strategies of (in)visibility in the narrative imaginary are posed for those who are under the eye of powerful forces.

KEYWORDS

Pentateuch, cultural theory, postcolonial feminist criticism