Of Bodies and Subjects: The Movement of Female Bodies into Subjectivity in Four Biblical Narratives

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The way people are treated (or mistreated) depends largely on whether their bodies have status as subjects, or whether they are viewed as objects. Unequal power relations are often characterized by a conception of certain types of bodies (female, colored, impoverished, sick) as objects. Conversely, liberation from abuse and the right to be treated with dignity are often accompanied by an insistence that bodies be treated as subjects rather than as objects. Such a movement from object to subject is profoundly redemptive, both psychologically and physically.

In this paper I will explore the possibility of the body's transformation from object to subject by way of bodily action and speech. By placing the ideas of three very different thinkers, Gustavo Gutierrez, Johann Baptist Metz, and Jacques Lacan alongside four biblical narratives, I would like show how four women (Ruth, Bathsheba, Esther, and the hemorrhaging woman of Luke 8:42) use action and speech in their movements from object to subject. The four stories I have in mind are Ruth's interaction with Boaz, Bathsheba's visit to David at the end of his life to plead for the coronation of Solomon (1 Kgs 1:11–35), Esther's approach to the King after hearing of the plans for Jewish extermination, and the hemorrhaging woman's touch of Jesus' cloak (I am using Luke 8:40–48,

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but the same pericope also occurs in Matthew 9:18–22 and Mark 5:21–34). The ideas of Gutierrez, Metz, and Lacan lead me to suggest that for these four biblical women, the transforming process of subjectivity begins in their simple acts of bodily resistance, is completed by their speech, and has positive results for their bodies.

I have chosen to examine Lacan, Metz, and Gutierrez, not because of any inherent connection between the three (although Gutierrez does refer to Metz in his *Theology of Liberation*), but because they fit nicely into a discussion of a speaking/acting self. Both Metz and Lacan are interested in the formation of the subject—Metz in the realm of action, Lacan in the realm of language and speech. Gutierrez is helpful in giving practical expression to Metz's more abstract ideas.

However, while I find these authors helpful in a discussion of subjectivity, I am aware that the terms *subject* and *subjectivity* tend to invoke a much larger philosophical discussion about the subject, into which I am only tapping at a very superficial level. Without opening up a discussion about all of the larger issues, I will say that certain ideas of authors like Lacan have made me consider the grammatical definitions of the terms "subject" and "object" useful in the discussion of emerging subjectivity. The way discourse, particularly speech, is constructed may be an indicator of subjectivity. Given that choice of grammatical construction operates within the larger narrative context of human interaction, I am asking if the grammatical structure of stories tells us something about whether characters function as subjects or as objects. For the purposes of exploring this idea, then, I will align the terms subject and object with their grammatical definitions: a subject is one taking initiative—speaking and acting—and an object is that which is acted upon. Thus the emergence of subjectivity for the women in question will be assessed in terms of their ability to act and to speak as subjects, as opposed to being passive recipients of other peoples' actions. In other words, the grammatical choices made in narrative may indicate something about characters' ability to show agency.

My paper will look at these four narratives from three angles: first, I will discuss the problem of the body as object; second, I will explore the formation of the subject through action, following the ideas of Metz and Gutierrez; and finally, I will describe the grammatical movement from object to subject through interlocution and speech, after Lacan.

Human Bodies as Objects

It is my conviction that although subjectivity is the rightful property of bodies, bodies are often (mis)treated as objects. Though it is not a logical given that objects should be mistreated (we do not necessarily mistreat

our cars), it seems that bodies as objects are mistreated. Some scholars would argue that this is because theological and philosophical precedents have created a milieu in which bodies are disregarded and disdained (McFague 1993, 48). The subject has been philosophically separated from the body, leaving the body in a position of negative status. Thus bodies are considered not only as objects, but as objects of disdain, allowing mistreatment without guilt.

As I see it, the distinction between bodies as subjects and bodies as objects is often reflected in the well-being of the bodies. Bodies that house speaking/acting subjects are bodies that are privileged (well-clothed, well-fed, well-off). Conversely, if we look at the types of bodies that are viewed as objects (female, impoverished, suffering), we find that, not surprisingly, these bodies are typically voiceless and passive. Bodies that do not appear to house speaking/acting subjects are often underprivileged and treated badly (as objects).

The conception of passive, voiceless bodies as objects produces a vicious circle of mistreatment and justification for such behavior. Often bodies are judged according to societal norms (that is, according to the bodies of speaking/acting subjects), producing categories of objectified bodies. Thus, if white, educated, Aryan is the "norm," then black or uneducated or Jew becomes a category: objectification is formalized. Categorization allows the mistreatment of bodies to be easily justified. By placing other bodies in categories separate from themselves, "subjects" disassociate themselves from "objects" and can thus justify mistreatment of them.

That women are categorized and viewed as objects in the Bible has been a source of much feminist criticism. Women, it has been lamented, are described as possessions, as sexual objects, and as baby (boy) producers (Fuchs 1989, 161). When we look at Ruth, Bathsheba, Esther, and the hemorrhaging woman, we find that this assessment is not far from wrong. For instance, in the initial narrative about Bathsheba (2 Sam 11–12), she is a nameless woman. When a proper name is used to refer to Bathsheba in this narrative, it is always a possessive term, such as the daughter of Eliam or the wife of Uriah (see 2 Sam 2:3, 26; 12:9, 10, 24). The actual name *Bathsheba* is used only twice (11:3; 12:24), at the beginning and end of the story, and then only to mark the change in possession: Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, becomes Bathsheba, David's wife. (In our section of the story, she is initially referred to as Solomon's mother [1 Kgs 1:11].) Furthermore, the descriptions of her are purely sexual. In four verses (2 Sam 11:2–5) she is described as "bathing," "beautiful," and, "the wife of Uriah." In her relations with David, she is acted upon: he sends for her and he lies with her. Her own actions are to appear on

demand, to have purified herself sexually, to conceive a child (male), and to send word to David about his child.

Likewise, Esther is described as a sexual object. She is introduced to the reader in terms of her outstanding beauty. In addition, her introduction is precipitated by the deportment of Queen Vashti who, by refusing to entertain the King and his men, did not fill the role of object as desired. As the potential new queen, Esther's identity is very quickly established with reference to the King. Within three verses after her introduction into the narrative, her identity is established as the favorite member of the King's harem (Esth 2:6–9). She, like Bathsheba, is acted upon (though more favorably): she is *taken* to the palace, *given* beauty treatments, and only able to enter the King's presence on his demand. And the merit that determines her selection, and subsequent identity as Queen, is Ahasuerus' love for her.

There is less we can say about the woman who secretly touched Jesus' cloak in order to be healed from her hemorrhaging. The vignette is so short. Like Esther, her identity is established sexually: in this case, by sexual uncleanness and incompleteness. According to Jewish Law, a hemorrhaging women would always be unclean (Lev 15:19–27), and would thus be prohibited, or strongly discouraged, from having sexual relations. It is also significant that she is not named.

Ruth is portrayed in a slightly different fashion. She is not as flat a character as the other three women. The narrative does not treat Ruth purely as an (sex) object: there is no mention of her beauty, and in a relatively long narrative, the narrator refers to her only three times as a possession (Naomi's daughter-in-law) (Ruth 1:22; 2:20, 22).

The narrator's rather unusual portrayal of a woman contrasts with Boaz's words to and about Ruth. The grammar here betrays his view of women as objects: the second sentence he utters in the story is, "To whom does that young woman belong?" (Ruth 2:5). Furthermore, he does not use Ruth's name when he speaks to her (calling her "my daughter" in 2:8), and in his instructions to his men regarding her request to glean in his field (2:15–16) he refers to her four times, only once as subject (of the verb to gather—לקט), and three times as a feminine object suffixed to masculine plural verbs. It must be noted, though, that in his speech to her in 2:11–12, he does (hypocritically?) refer to her as the subject of the second person feminine singular active verbs, never as object. But even at the end of the story, after Ruth has been operating fully as subject, Boaz speaks to the elders of the town about acquiring (קנה) her: land and woman are conflated into one object.

The book of Ruth is also an unusual story because from the outset, Ruth is portrayed as a speaking subject. In the other three stories we find

that the women are typical objects in their voicelessness. They do not become full speaking subjects until after they have taken action. It is in silence and anonymity that the hemorrhaging woman reaches for Jesus' cloak. Likewise, throughout the whole first section of narrative involving Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11–12), though she is a central figure, she only says, via messengers, "I am pregnant" (2 Sam 11:5). Even in the second part of the narrative (1 Kgs 1:1–35), when Nathan asks Bathsheba whether she has heard the news about the danger to Solomon, he does not give her a chance to answer before instructing her in how to approach David to ensure Solomon's place as heir to the throne (1 Kgs 1:1–14).

Similarly, Esther does not speak for the first four chapters of her story. When she does finally speak, it is only to Mordecai indirectly, through messengers (like Bathsheba). It is interesting that Mordecai (the Jew) does not speak either. The only speaking subjects in the first four chapters (until 4:11) are the King and his officials. Esther's first message, sent in response to her uncle Mordecai's plea that she speak to the King on behalf of her endangered Jewish people, only proclaims her voicelessness and her status as object: "For any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned, the king has but one law: that they be put to death....Thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king" (Esth 4:11). Her second message expresses more intentionality, but it still expresses her role as disposable object: "I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish" (Esth 4:16).

Although both Bathsheba's message, "I am pregnant" and Esther's, "I must be summoned," seem to indicate a fatalistic acceptance of their role as objects (baby producer/sex toy), one could argue that for both women, these messages are the beginning of the subjective process.

Not only are these women/objects introduced as typically voiceless, they are also all categorized. To begin with, they all fall into the category of Woman. We can see from the interaction between Queen Vashti and Xerxes (Esth 1:9–22) that women, royal or otherwise, were expected to behave in certain ways. They were to be seen from time to time and not heard. Their role was to be wife, their function to produce sons; it is clear that Bathsheba's main function is to produce Solomon. Esther also fits into the racial category of Jew. The narrative details the process by which Jews are turned *en masse* into objects: Haman deals with his hatred of Mordecai by categorizing him as other (Jew) and then planning a systematic annihilation of the entire category. Ruth also fits into a racial category of Moabite; but this is only one of several social categories—woman, foreigner, childless, and widow—to which she belongs (Bal 1987, 79). The hemorrhaging woman fits into yet another sort of category, that of

sickness. As a bleeding woman she also fits into the category of "unclean," which would be considered a moral category.

In each case, the categorization of these women as objects leads to a precarious place for their bodies. As a foreign woman and widow, Ruth is rendered very poor, and in need of food and shelter (although she lives with her mother-in-law, Naomi, who is also poor as a childless, widowed woman). Esther, by virtue of being a Jew, stands to lose her life. Bathsheba, as mother of Solomon, will lose her son (her progeny) as well as her life if Solomon is not crowned. The loss of a son (and the lineage represented by the son) has direct bodily repercussions. Based on the importance of sons for Old Testament women (Fuchs 1989, 161), one can surmise that the bodily well-being of women depended on their ability to produce (male) children. And in the case of the hemorrhaging woman one can only imagine the bodily constraints of constant bleeding: marriage may not be an option (we do not know), progeny is certainly not an option. According to the Markan version of the story, she also fits into the category of the poor: she had spent all she had on doctors (Mk 5:26). In each case, we see that bodily oppression is not a simple dichotomy (women are good, men are bad) but the result of a societal process of objectification.

Subjectivity Through Action

It appears that for bodies objectivity is an unhealthy situation, which needs to change. Bodies need to be established in a position of subjectivity. But once objectification has occurred it is difficult to undo. While the process of objectification seems as easy as building boxes around people, the boxes are in actuality manifestations of systemic malaise, fed by cultural norms and fortified by language. Furthermore, subjectivity is a complex process at the best of times. The addition of de-objectification to this process may be a daunting undertaking.

How could subjectivity occur in such a way that would help rectify the unfortunate objectification of the body? The work of Metz and Gutierrez has suggested to me that bodies must be physically and interactively involved in the process. I turn now to these thinkers to explore their ideas of subjectivity in relation to the body.

In his book, *Faith in History and Society* (1980), Metz develops the relationship between history, society, faith, praxis, and the subject. Metz places the subject in the political and practical (thus physical) realm. He is concerned with "the painful dialectical tension between subject and object" (81, n.23) and the movement from non-identity (object) to subject. He sees subjectivity as inseparable from history and society. For

Metz, subjectivity begins with faith and continues as an entirely interactive societal process (61).

In other words, subjectivity occurs through solidarity. Metz insists that solidarity is an essential ingredient for a practical and fundamental theology; it liberates objects and brings subjects into being:

> Solidarity is above all a category of help, support and togetherness, by which the subject, suffering acutely and threatened, can be raised up. Like memory and narrative, it is one of the fundamental definitions of a theology and a Church which aims to express its redeeming and liberating force in the history of human suffering, not above men's heads and ignoring the problem of their painful non-identity. (Metz 1980, 229)

The praxis of solidarity emphasizes the importance of interaction (and thus, bodies) in the process of subjectivity.

A logical extension of Metz's ideas can be seen in liberation theology. Metz's argument seems to leave off at establishing the necessity of interaction, solidarity and a temporally based theology for subjectivity. But liberation theologians, who, it seems to me, express the process of subjectivity as liberation, are explicit about the movement from solidarity to active participation of bodies for change.

Gutierrez writes, "the process of liberation requires the active participation of the oppressed" (1973, 113). Solidarity begins the movement into subjectivity/liberation by breaking down walls built to categorize. It creates a society in which dignity encourages the poor and oppressed to take a stance of resistance: "the people themselves, especially farmers and working men, exploited and unjustly kept in the background, must take part in their own liberation" (1973,113). The importance of this for my argument is that such resistance to being categorized as object implies initiative and action on the part of "objectified" bodies. In my view, since both initiative and action are essential properties of a grammatical subject, they are central to the transformation of objects into subjects.

The ideas of Metz and Gutierrez have caused me to wonder if perhaps the subjectivity of textual characters could be analyzed in terms of bodily resistances (actions) precipitated by faith and solidarity. All four of our women use their bodies to protest the destruction which would finalize their status as disposable objects. All of them take action. The actions in themselves are not flamboyant dramatics of resistance, but rather simple placements of bodies. Esther stands at the entrance to the King's hall; Ruth goes to glean in Boaz's field and later lies at his feet on the threshing floor; the woman touches Jesus' garment; Bathsheba kneels before David. These are their quiet bodily initiatives of resistance which begin the process of subjectivity.

Of all these actions, Ruth's action on the threshing floor is most bold, since it is commonly agreed that feet in this instance may refer to genitals. Although this is the climax of the narrative, and Ruth's bodily resistance to being widowed and childless, she actually begins her bodily resistance to poverty and hunger earlier, by going to find food amongst the harvesters.

Some of these actions, though not all, can be seen as acts of faith and of solidarity, corresponding to Metz's criteria for subjectivity. The most obvious act of faith is the woman touching Jesus for healing. But it might be said that Esther also acts on faith, given Mordecai's exhortation, "Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" and given Esther's instructions to Mordecai to fast with her. This faith is predicated on a sense of solidarity with the Jewish people. Her simple act of standing in the inner court begins the process by which the whole people will be returned to its status as a collection of subjects (as opposed to a category of objects). Ruth also acts out of a sense of solidarity with Naomi and this indicates faith at some level: "your people will be my people and your God, my God." Her adoption of the Hebrew culture and its legal system implies faith in the God to whom the Law belonged. Likewise, Bathsheba is acting in solidarity with her son. Her action directly affects the subjectivity of Solomon, around whom the next eleven chapters of narrative revolve. It might also be said that Bathsheba's movement toward subjectivity is enabled by Nathan's solidarity with her. (Nathan also stood to lose his life.) But apart from carrying out the instructions of a prophet, Bathsheba's action only represents political calculation, not faith.

Subjectivity Through Speech

Bodies can also be involved in the process of subjectivity through speech. Lacan takes up speech and subjectivity in *The Language of the Self.* Part of Lacan's psychoanalytic technique is to move the patient from the *"moi"* (object) to the *"je"* (subject). This takes place in the context of discourse (with the analyst):

> When the subject commits himself to analysis he accepts a position more constituting in itself than all the duties by which he allows himself to be more or less enticed: that of interlocution....The allocution of the subject entails an allocutor—in other words, the locutor is constituted in it as intersubjectivity. (Lacan 1968, 19–20)

Thus, for Lacan, intersubjectivity takes place through a call/response mechanism of interlocution:

> For the function of Language is not to inform but to evoke. What I seek in the Word is the response of the other. What constitutes me as subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I utter what was only in view of what will be. In order to find him, I call him by a name which he must assume or refuse in order to reply to me....If I call the person to whom I am speaking by whatever name I choose to give him, I intimate to him the subjective function that he will take on again in order to reply to me, even if it is to repudiate this function. (Lacan 1968: 63–64)

Lacan writes from the viewpoint of an already-constituted-speaking-subject who is in a position to call another to subjectivity. This may seem to reinforce an entrenched subject/object, doctor/patient relationship, but the point is that subjectivity requires speech. The call of allocution is a call to response, and with the initiative required for response the transformation from object to subject begins.

By reading Lacan alongside the biblical stories, I might say that one of the most important functions of these four women's actions is that they all engender a call to speech. In each story a woman takes action on her own behalf and in solidarity with others. In each case, her action provokes the man she is approaching to ask a question to which she responds, completing the transformation from object to subject: her bodily resistance engenders a call to speech. In other words, the actions provoke a question from already-constituted subjects, to which these women can then speak. Jesus asks, "Who touched me?" Ahasuerus asks, "What is it Queen Esther?" David says, "What is it?" And Boaz asks, "Who are you?" (Actually, Ruth's first action, gleaning, provokes not a question from Boaz, but a short allocution, to which she is also able to respond.)

But if I were to continue in a Lacanian vein, I would have to also ask myself about the contents of these speeches. Not only is it important that these women speak, but the way they refer to themselves is important. Is there a move from the "moi" to the "je" in their speech?

To assess this, as I look at the four stories, I will analyze the women's speeches for components of what I would call object statements (*moi*) and subject statements (*je*). For the purposes of this paper, I will propose that grammatically speaking, subject statements (in Hebrew) use either the subject pronoun "I" (אנכי/אני), and/or first person active verbs such as "I will go" (אבוא). Object statements consist of one or more of the following: (a) the object pronoun "me" (אותי); (b) first person object suffixes attached to verbs or prepositions, such as "with me" (אותי); (c) first person passive verbs, such as "I have been called" (נקראתי); (d) third person references to the self, usually possessives, such as "your servant" (עבדך).

I am including third person references to the self (your servant) in the category of the *"moi,"* because Lacan speaks of the self's capture by the other:

> [I]n a primordial ambivalence which appears to us...'as in a mirror' in the sense that the subject identifies his sentiment of Self in the image of the other....Thus...the first effect of the *Imago* which appears in human beings is an effect of alienation in the subject. It is in the other that the subject identifies and even senses himself at first. (Lacan 1950:45)

This alienating "dialectic of the identification with the other" (Lacan 1949, 450) is the objectification of the *je* (the *moi*). A description of the self as "your servant," or "your handmaid," seems to be an understanding of the self in the terms of the other, and so objectified.

By doing this sort of analysis, I am not trying to tie subjectivity solely to grammar, nor am I trying to do discourse analysis, which would be much more complex. I am merely looking at grammatical formulation as one level of human interaction, and suggesting that when this grammatical formulation is analysed within the narrative context, it may provide insight into the narratives' characterizations and progressions of subjectivity. When I analyze the speeches of these women to see how they refer to themselves, I find that the speeches contain combinations of object and subject statements. These combinations seem to indicate that subjectivity is not an instantaneous event but rather a complex and ongoing process.

I will begin with Bathsheba's story. The narrative structure of 1 Kgs 1:11–31 illustrates Bathsheba's movement into subjectivity in two ways. The first is in the placement of Bathsheba's name, the second is in the grammar of her speeches. As Bathsheba takes action, she is referred to, for the first time, simply as Bathsheba (1:15, 16)—not as Uriah's wife, or David's wife, or Solomon's mother. When David calls her in a second time (1:28), he uses her name: "Call to me Bathsheba." In a sense, this is both the full acknowledgment of this woman as a subject, and the climax of the story. For after this, David swears that Solomon (Bathsheba's progeny) will be his successor. Once Bathsheba has been called to speech, she makes only two speeches regarding her son's fate (1:17–21, 31), and she refers to herself only twice, both times within the first speech. First, she uses an object statement, calling herself, "your handmaid" (אמתך): "You swore to your handmaid" (1:17). In her second self-reference, she voices the crisis of certain death and in doing so shifts to subject statements, using a subject pronoun and active verb: "When my Lord the King is laid with his fathers *I* (אני), and my son Solomon, *will become* (והיו) as criminals" (1:21). Bathsheba is transformed from a silent body that is acted

upon as property to a recognized acting and speaking body who takes initiative to save her life.

The combination of subject and object statements in Esther also shows a progression of subjectivity. As noted earlier, Esther actually speaks indirectly (through messengers) before she takes action and pays a visit to the King (4:11,16). Her two messages move from the more passive combination of subject and object statements, "*I* have not *been called*" (ואני לא נקראתי [4:11]), to the active, "*I* and my maids *will fast*, then *I will go* to the king" (גם־אני ונערתי אצום כן ובכן אבוא אל־המלך [4:16]). These statements are immediately followed by her action and her first direct speech. Following her action, in her direct speeches (5:4,8; 7:3–4; 8:5–6) she primarily uses subject statements to refer to herself. We only find her referring to herself with an object suffix attached to a preposition (object statement) in the phrase, "If I have found favor...my life will be given *to me* (תנתן־לי)" (7:3). (This is not as evident in translation of her speeches. For instance, the NIV translates אם־מצאתי חן בעיני המלך [5:8; 8:5] as "if the king regards me with favor," making "the king" the subject and "me" the object, when in actuality it is a first person verb, "if I have found favor in the eyes of the king.")

In contrast to her increasing use of subject statements when referring to herself, we find a combination of object and subject statements when Esther is describing the plight of her people. She begins her petition by using a passive verb (object statement), "*We have been sold* (נמכרנו) into destruction" (7:4). This passive verb is an entirely accurate grammatical description of her people's treatment as category and object. However, the passive verb is followed immediately by a first person subject pronoun (subject statement), "We have been sold, *I* (אני) and my people" (7:4a). The same passive verb is used again in the next line, this time immediately followed by an active first person verb (subject statement), "If for slavery we had been sold, *I would be silent* (החרשתי)" (7:4b). So the first person pronoun and active verb could be said to counter the uses of the collective passive verb, distinguishing and asserting Esther's rightful position as subject.

Ruth presents a more complicated mixture of object and subject statements in her speeches. The progression into subjectivity is not as obvious. As noted earlier, Ruth is a speaking subject prior to her first initiative with Boaz while she is gleaning. It could be argued that Ruth's subjectivity is the result of an earlier progression of action and interlocution. After the death of her husband, Ruth clings to her mother-in-law Naomi; this causes Naomi to say, "Go home," to which Ruth responds as a speaking subject for the first time. She makes two speeches to Naomi, before encountering Boaz. In her first speech (1:16–17), we find both

object and subject statements. She uses three first person active verbs to refer to herself (subject statements): "Where you go, *I will go* (אלך), and where you stay *I will stay* (אלין)....Where you die *I will die* (אמות)." She uses one passive verb (object statement): "and there *I will be buried* (אקבר)"; and three object suffixes (object statements): "Do not urge *me* (אל־תפגעי־בי) to leave you," and "May the Lord do thus and more *to me* (לי), for death will divide you and *me* (ביני)." However, her second speech, made after she and Naomi have returned to Israel, contains only first person active verbs (subject statements), "Let *me go* (אלכה־נה) to the fields, and *gather* (ואלקטה) grain behind one in whose eyes *I find* (אמצא) favor" (2:2).

It would be rather tidy to say that the progression up to this point in the story is from object (voiceless) through middle ground (subject and object statements combined) to full subject (only subject statements). Then, on the basis of Ruth's second speech to Naomi, one would expect that when the action/interlocution pattern is repeated with Boaz (in the harvest field, and on the threshing floor), Ruth would respond to Boaz's allocutions fully as subject. Instead, we continue to find a combination of object and subject statements in her responses to Boaz. Each of her speeches to Boaz includes a strong statement of subjectivity, but they also include references to herself as object.

For instance, after Boaz's first allocution in the harvest field, Ruth responds (2:10) with two subject statements, "Why have *I found* (מצאתי) favor?" and "*I* am a foreigner (ואנכי נכריה)." But sandwiched between these two subject statements is an infinitive construct with a first person object suffix attached (object statement), "Why have I found favor in your eyes (that you) recognize *me* (להכירני)."

Ruth's next speech (2:13) also comprises two subject statements, between which two object statements are placed. "*I will find* (אמצא) favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted *me* (נחמתני), and spoken kindly to *your maid-servant* (שפחתך), and *I, I am not* (ואנכי לא אהיה) like one of your maid-servants."

She then has three short speeches to Naomi (2:19, 21; 3:5). In the first and last she makes subject statements using first person active verbs: "The name of the man *I worked* (עשיתי) with was Boaz," and "All that you say, *I will do* (אעשה)." But when explaining her interaction with Boaz (2:21) she uses a preposition with an object suffix (object statement), "He said *to me* (כי אמר אלי)...."

Ruth's last speech occurs on the threshing floor, after she has made her bold move of uncovering Boaz's "feet"(3:9). Boaz asks, "Who are you?" Ruth replies with the strongest statement of subjectivity found in any of these stories, "*I* am Ruth (אנכי רות)." However, this is immediately

modified by object statements, "*your handmaid* (אמתך), spread your skirt (wing) over *your handmaid*, for you are redeemer."

This combination of subject and object statements could be read in a number of ways. We could say that although Ruth is operating as subject, she is conditioned as a woman to behave as object with men, and so she mixes the two. Read in another way, these speeches seem clever and amusingly ironic, a way of both deferring to Boaz to get what she wants, and at the same time asserting her subjectivity. For instance, in her second speech to Boaz (2:13), Ruth plays up to Boaz by extolling his kind actions toward her (his maidservant), but then immediately contradicts her object statement ("your maidservant") by making a very strong subject statement ("I, I am not like one of your maidservants") which voices her subjectivity and asserts that she is not actually his object.

Ruth's speeches indicate that she is operating fully as subject, but in order to procure continued subjectivity for herself, she defers to Boaz by speaking of herself as object. Even in her short speeches to Naomi, she refers to herself as subject, but when she is describing her interaction with Boaz, she describes it according to the way she played the role of object: "He said *to me.*" In the end, as a result of her final action and speech, where she (cunningly?) softens the strong subjective statement "I am Ruth," with "your handmaiden," Ruth gets what she wants. Ruth obtains subjectivity precisely in her manipulation of Boaz's view of her as object. Ultimately, she emerges as a true subject, acting and speaking, rather than being acted upon.

Ruth's subjectivity has been discussed by feminist scholars in a less optimistic light. Mieke Bal, in *Lethal Love* (77–79), downplays Ruth's subjectivity in the story: she argues that Ruth, "reaches full textual subjectivity in the metatext only" (79); that is, as the mother of Obed, grandfather of David. Likewise, Esther Fuchs in her article, "Mothers and Sexual Politics," suggests that the narrative hides the fact that Ruth is only an object. Fuchs criticizes the narrative for portraying Ruth as fighting for her own benefit, when in actuality the benefit is to patrilineage of the deceased husband: "By projecting onto woman what man desires most, the biblical narrative creates womanhood in its own image" (161). While this is an interesting insight into the text, it belittles Ruth's transformation into subject, through her use of a male oriented system to her benefit. Ruth is looking for financial security *as well as* progeny. In my estimation these readings border on a form of textual subjugation; that is, Ruth must remain object, created in the image of patrilineage and male desire. As I see it, the beauty of this text is that Ruth becomes subject, in spite of male desire. In fact, as a becoming-subject, she manipulates that desire.

The story of the hemorrhaging woman is different from the other stories, in that the woman is not actually given direct dialogue in any of the gospel accounts. But more than provoking a call to speech, her action precipitates her healing, and her healing removes her from the category of unclean and untouchable. She is also called to speech, even though it is not reported directly in this case. Although we see her fear of actually speaking forth in the crowd, her confession to Jesus is a confirmation of her healing. It is remarkable that a woman, hitherto confined to "the rear of the crowd, the appropriate place for the defiled" (Guelich 1989, 297), is now speaking in the center of the crowd. It is also interesting to note that in this case, it is as if the subject/object roles are reversed: Jesus speaks of himself as the object, "Who touched *me?*" (Luke 8:45). The question begs for the answer of a subject, "I did." The physical healing of this woman stands as a symbol of the transformation from object to subject. An act of bodily resistance has produced both a speaking subject and a healthy, whole body.

In the other stories, too, we can see the bodily repercussions of the action-to-speech progression. Once operating fully as speaking subjects, these women are able to affect bodies, their own and others', for good. As already mentioned, Bathsheba's life is saved and her progeny crowned; Ruth secures for herself food, shelter and progeny; and Esther and the Jewish race are saved from slaughter and annihilation. It is good for bodies to become subjects.

Concluding Remarks

I find the four texts I have examined to be hopeful. The possibility found within them is of a transformation from body as object to body as subject, by way of action and speech. This has caused me to think about a model for such a transformation in real life. Can strategic bodily resistance really engender a call to speech, and so, subjectivity? Every day, thousands of bodies are disposed of as objects. Is the transformation of these bodies into subjects possible? Is bodily resistance a viable option for persons with guns to their heads?

Returning to the texts, we see that the initiation of such a transformation involves an element of risk. Esther risked death on entering the King's presence. Ruth risked humiliation, perhaps stoning, as a "licentious" woman. The hemorrhaging woman risked being exposed as unclean, and disciplined. Bathsheba risked the anger of David, and loss of the kingdom for Solomon (and thus death). These risks were weighed in light of the situations, and taken; and the results were favorable. Undoubtedly, in many real-life situations the risk is taken to no apparent end. But surely it is better to die in the becoming than never to have tried.

But is the idea of a call to speech a trite dream, a mockery of desperate situations? Is there any hope that the voiceless will be called to speech, before they are done away with? It is true that in these texts the men involved were, in general, favorably disposed to these women, even if we could detect an element of risk. Perhaps in situations of immediate bodily violence, a call to speech is unlikely: bodily resistance may only generate more violence. But perhaps for those whose objectivity is a long, slow, silent grind into oblivion, the precipitation of a call to speech is a possible goal.

I do not know the answers to these questions. But I do hope for a world where bodies will no longer be (mis)treated as objects. I hope for a world full of the dignity of speaking, acting subjects. I hope that within my own historical and societal world, this transformation will be possible. As one often struggling against the constraints of being categorized as woman, perhaps I need to develop a strategy of action that will consistently precipitate a call to speech. But more importantly, as member of the voiced and privileged class, I believe that it is my obligation to heed the call to solidarity, to break down the walls of objectification, and to call the voiceless to speech.

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