

POSTCOLONIALISM AND THE HEBREW BIBLE





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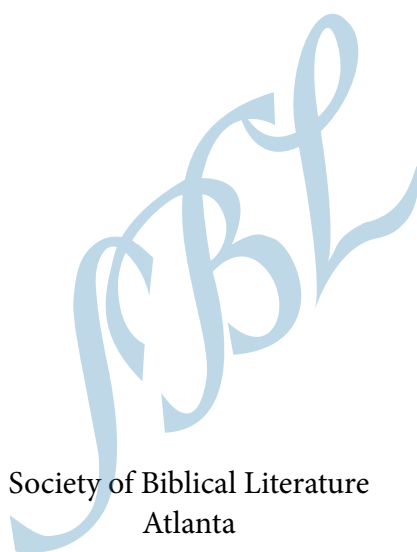
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POSTCOLONIALISM AND THE HEBREW BIBLE
The Next Step

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Edited by
Roland Boer



Society of Biblical Literature
Atlanta

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------|---|
| AB | Anchor Bible |
| ATD | Das Alte Testament Deutsch |
| AcT | <i>Acta Theologica</i> |
| ANET | <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.</i> Edited by James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969 |
| BA | <i>Biblical Archeologist</i> |
| BASOR | <i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i> |
| BBC | Blackwell Bible Commentaries |
| BCT | <i>The Bible and Critical Theory</i> |
| BibInt | <i>Biblical Interpretation</i> |
| BMW | Bible in the Modern World |
| BTB | <i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i> |
| BTIJ | <i>Black Theology: An International Journal</i> |
| BZAW | Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft |
| BZMT | Beiträge zur mimetischen Theorie |
| CS | Christian Scriptures |
| CSSH | <i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i> |
| EJA | <i>European Journal of Archaeology</i> |
| ExpTim | <i>Expository Times</i> |
| FRLANT | Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments |
| Gesenius | Gesenius, Wilhelm. <i>Thesaurus philologicus criticus linguae hebraeae et chaldaeae Veteris Testamenti</i> . Vols. 1–3. Leipzig: Vogel, 1829–1842. |
| HBT | <i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i> |
| HLS | <i>Holy Land Studies: A Multidisciplinary Journal</i> |
| IBMR | <i>International Bulletin of Missionary Research</i> |
| ICC | International Critical Commentary |
| IRM | <i>International Review of Mission</i> |

| | |
|---------|---|
| ISR | <i>International Socialist Review</i> |
| JAH | <i>Journal of African History</i> |
| JAOS | <i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i> |
| JBL | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i> |
| JBQ | <i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i> |
| JETS | <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i> |
| JEtS | <i>Journal of Ethnic Studies</i> |
| JIH | <i>Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture</i> |
| JRA | <i>Journal of Religion in Africa</i> |
| JSOT | <i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i> |
| JSOTSup | Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series |
| JSS | <i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i> |
| JTSA | <i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i> |
| KTU | <i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Edited by Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1976. 2nd enlarged ed. of KTU: <i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places</i> . Edited by Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995. |
| LHBOTS | Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies |
| Neot | <i>Neotestamentica</i> |
| NICOT | New International Commentary on the Old Testament |
| OTE | <i>Old Testament Essays</i> |
| OTL | Old Testament Library |
| OTS | <i>Old Testament Studies</i> |
| PEQ | <i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i> |
| ScrHier | <i>Scripta Hierosolymitana</i> |
| SHBC | Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary |
| SJOT | <i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i> |
| SocT | <i>Social Text</i> |
| SWC | <i>Studies in World Christianity</i> |
| UQR | <i>Union Quarterly Review</i> |
| VT | <i>Vetus Testamentum</i> |
| VTSup | Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i> |
| WBC | Word Bible Commentary |
| ZAW | <i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i> |

INTRODUCTION

Roland Boer

Although postcolonial approaches to the Bible were first broached by Hebrew Bible scholars, it has been some time since a volume of collected essays on the Hebrew Bible has been produced. In the hypermarket of academic fashions, a decade seems like an eternity. So when one writes “in the early days” of postcolonial criticism, it designates barely more than a decade and a half, yet within that time and in the vast swirl of possible approaches to biblical interpretation, let alone the wider field of literary criticism, postcolonial criticism has established itself as a major approach in biblical studies. Two other streams have combined to cement postcolonial criticism in such a dominant position. The first is the older stream of liberation readings, emerging during the 1960s but actually deriving from a millennia-long tradition of popular revolutionary engagements with the Bible, among the marginalized poor in Latin America, African Americans in the United States, women, and queers in many parts of the world. The second is the development of anti-imperial readings, in which various subtle codes and subthemes are read as counters to the dominance of empires, right through from the Assyrians to the Romans. Postcolonial, liberation, and anti-imperial—these then have mutually encouraged one another to speak up and not hold their many tongues.

As the essays and books on postcolonial analysis began to flow, as more and more texts came under analysis, as scholars from Sweden to the Sudan, from Botswana to Buenos Aires became interested in postcolonial approaches, the initiative has clearly been taken up by New Testament scholars. In this light and in the most comradely of gestures, in this volume scholars of the Hebrew Bible have taken up the challenge and gathered together a collection of essays in order to take the debate a step or two forward. That the time is right for such an intervention may be signaled by the fact that in 2011 a new program unit at the SBL began its work, called

Postcolonialism and Biblical Studies and chaired by Christopher Stanley and Yak-Hwee Tan. Up until now, papers have been presented in a variety of sessions, from African Biblical Hermeneutics, through Ezra–Nehemiah, to Ideological Criticism. At least now we have an umbrella section where all the potentialities of the intersections between biblical criticism and postcolonialism may be explored.

Before proceeding, a word of definition: it is an old point but worth repeating, that the “post” in postcolonial has a dual reference, the one temporal and the other critical. Temporally, *postcolonialism* refers both to a period of time after the era of capitalist colonialism that came to an untidy end with the final wave of anticolonial revolutions in the 1950s and 1960s, and to new, more subtle and often more brutal forms of neocolonialism. Critically, *postcolonialism* designates a renewed and very different mode of assessing colonial eras. Initially, the focus was very much the era of capitalist colonialism that seemed to be passing, with much attention given to the British Empire. But postcolonial criticism also developed tools for analyzing all manner of colonial endeavors, whether in the dim and distant past or very much in the present (such as the fading US empire).

For the remainder of the introduction, I offer the generically expected survey of the contributions gathered here, so that readers may gain an overview and dip in where interest is piqued. Authors for the volume were given a good deal of room to move, either focusing on a biblical text with postcolonial methodology, or exploring the interactions between the Bible and a (post)colonial context.

We begin with Judith McKinlay’s “Playing an Aotearoa Counterpoint: The Daughters of Zelophehad and Edward Gibbon Wakefield,” in which she takes the brief double narrative concerning the daughters of Zelophehad in the book of Numbers (chs. 27 and 36), and follows the postcolonial strategy, advocated by Musa Dube and others, of setting together texts from different times and contexts in such a way that their colonizing ideologies may be seen in sharper focus. McKinlay follows Tat-siong Benny Liew’s description of “using race/ethnicity and/or postcolonialism as an interpretative category” in such a way that it leads to “an extensive and intensive detour, that takes one to and through a different literary land(scape),” so that on return to the biblical text “what and how one sees” will be changed by the encounters (146). The issue in the Zelophehad daughters’ narrative is clearly a matter both of gender and of land. Viewed through a postcolonial lens, it concerns the distribution of land by those who have not yet arrived but who are already allotting property that is not theirs. In McKin-

lay's contribution, the different textual landscape through which a detour is made is that of nineteenth-century Aotearoa New Zealand. A contrapuntal reading sets the Numbers passages with texts concerning Edward Gibbon Wakefield and his New Zealand Company, and their settlement of Port Nicholson, planned from their base in London. The feminist turn in this postcolonial reading follows a strategy of imaginative conversation with the daughters, which unsettles the view of the daughters as five women who daringly challenge the ruling of the day, namely that only sons may inherit, as they are now seen demanding land that was not theirs, but other peoples' land. The question always to be asked and explored is whether viewing such texts together, biblical and nonbiblical, through a postcolonial lens brings a more acute awareness of the ways colonizing powers claim and maintain their dominance. Feminist and postcolonial readings are both inherently political, so it is McKinlay's contention that these texts do not remain isolated in the past, but face us with ourselves in all the complexities of our lives. This contribution is written in Aotearoa, a country still living with its colonial past, where the inhabitants currently live with the complexities of the consequences of the colonizers' land deals and settlements, and with their complicity, as *Pakeha* (non-Maori) in a politics that is still largely one of dominance.

There follows Althea Spencer-Miller's "Rethinking Orality for Biblical Studies," in which she draws deeply on the nature of orality in the Caribbean to propose some fundamental recastings of the treatments of orality and literacy in biblical criticism and wider afield. As she points out, Werner Kelber, Richard Horsley, and others have revitalized debates on the relationship between orality and early Christian literature. Subsequent discussions include themes of orality in conjunction with literacy, memory, performance, rhetoric, aurality, discourse, and even silence. Yet, in these discussions, orality remains an inferior in the conjoining but also a category that is not self-sufficient. This essay responds to orality's deprecation by arguing that orality is a substantive and independent communicative modality that functions alongside literacy with mundane regularity. This idea provides the basis for further exploration of hermeneutical and translation possibilities when orality is considered as a potent integrative force.

Also from the Caribbean is Steed Davidson and his "Gazing (at) Native Women: Rahab and Jael in Imperializing and Postcolonial Discourses." Davidson begins by pointing out that the position of Native Woman is an ambiguous one within postcolonial discourse. Given that the figure of the

Native Woman tends to be used by imperializing discourses as justification for conquest and other civilizing missions, anti-imperial discourses tend to gather around this figure as a means of preventing incursions into the homeland. Caught in the intersections of race, gender, and imperial power, the Native Woman hardly appears to possess any agency or liberatory potential. While not the subaltern that stands outside the frame, the challenge to construct/locate agency for the Native Woman remains a gap in postcolonial discourse. Davidson's contribution explores this dilemma with respect to Rahab and Jael in the books of Joshua and Judges respectively. He explores the limits in the work of various scholars that have treated these two figures from imperializing and anti-imperial perspectives. This lays the foundation for evaluating and proposing alternative positions for reading native women from a postcolonial perspective.

From Rahab and Jael as native women, we move to a very different but no less colonial situation in the Danish Empire, especially the period of the absolute monarchy from 1660 to 1848. In this context, Christina Petterson's "‘Nothing Like It Was Ever Made in Any Kingdom’: The Hunt for Solomon's Throne" explores the way the story of Solomon's throne in 1 Kings may be read alongside the appropriation of King Solomon by the kings of the absolute monarchy. Petterson focuses specifically on the actual throne used in the Danish royal anointment rituals from 1671 through to 1840. The throne itself was modeled on the ivory throne of Solomon, whose equal was not to be found in any kingdom (1 Kgs 10:18–20). The skeleton of the chair is wood—not just any kind of wood, but ebony, letterwood, and kingwood, veneered with narwhale tusk, and flanked by columns of turned tusk. Eight gilded allegorical figures decorate the corners and the throne is crowned with a massive amethyst. The throne presents itself as a striking piece of craftsmanship, an opulent display of wealth. It has endless symbolic value, drawing on a vast number of intertexts that present it as the seat of absolute potency. Petterson's chapter places both thrones in their imperial and biblical contexts and through these lenses provides an analysis of the materials used and the symbolism conveyed.

Uriah Kim follows with "Is There an 'Anticonquest' Ideology in the Book of Judges?" Kim deals with the use of anticonquest ideology in the book of Judges in general and Judg 10–12 in particular. This ideology allows ancient Israelites to claim foreign lands while securing their innocence and depicts the people of the land negatively in order to validate the conquest and annihilation of the land and its people. Jephthah's speech to the king of Ammonites (Judg 11:12–28) is fraught with rhetorical strategies and

assumptions that reflect the politics of God, land, and identity in ancient Israel. When Jephthah's anticonquest rhetoric is viewed from Josiah's reign, one of the three likely imperial contexts (the Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and Persian Empires) from which Judges was edited, it mimics the Neo-Assyrian imperial ideology of conquest, imitating the empire while at the same time undermining its authority. Thus the ancient Israelites' stance toward the empire is ambivalent, as is their view of women (11:1–11, 29–40) and relationship to one another (10:6–18; 12:1–7). Moreover, in spite of chapters 10–12 being framed by the proper judges (10:1–5 and 12:8–15), ancient Israel's conflict with others (10:6–18) and within its various peoples (12:1–7) reveal that its effort to formulate a coherent God–land–identity narrative was filled with irregularities and interruptions.

In similar territory—the companion book of Joshua—but with a very different focus is Johnny Miles's "The 'Enemy Within': Refracting Colonizing Rhetoric in Narratives of Gibeonite and Japanese Identity." Miles's concern is the treatment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War, read through an intersection with Josh 9 and the Gibeonites. In both cases, one may formulate the following thesis: only when threatened by the "alien" perceived as an enemy among the colonizer does the colonizer act in such a manner as to remove the enemy within. In order to explore this thesis, Miles analyzes the rhetoric of Josh 9 and juxtaposes it to that of twentieth-century American anti-Japanese sentiments. He uncovers numerous parallels between both groups' colonization experiences, parallels that simultaneously contributed to the identity construction process for each ethnic group. In addition to language naturally fueling prejudicial attitudes manifested in the exploitation of the "other" for the benefit of "self," language circumscribes a social space, within both the residential and labor sectors, and creates a narrative that altogether establishes ethnic boundary markers and reinforces ethnic identity. Miles's contribution refracts that rhetoric of a process which marks an ethnic group's status as subservient and colonized so as ultimately to reveal the true "enemy within."

Leo Perdue turns postcolonial analysis to historical concerns with his study, "Hosea and the Empire." Perdue draws upon the work of both Meindert Dijkstra (regarding the Babylonian crisis confronting Judah) and Homi Bhabha (concerning hybridity) in order to focus on what he calls the "neo-Babylonian metanarrative" in order to understand Second Isaiah as a hidden transcript. Perdue finds Bhabha's discussion of hybridity helpful in presenting a thick description of Jewish resistance to Babylonian

rule, especially among some of the exiles. For Bhabha the symbiosis of new events and discourse through hybridity leads to necessary cultural adaptations expressed through evolving tradition. Yet it is not merely adaptation with a view to assimilation that occurs. Rather, hybridity becomes a subversive tool designed to deconstruct the metanarrative of the empire. The objectives of the altered, past traditions in Second Isaiah were to subvert the influence of Babylonian rule on the exiles and to construct for themselves a new language and means of living that viewed Yahweh in monotheistic terms and the exiled community as the chosen people of the universal creator and director of history. This theology became the expression of a “revolutionary monotheism” that reshaped Judah’s theology and cultural hermeneutics and sought to subvert the influence of the empire on their religious identity and faith.

Our penultimate contribution has a distinctly South African focus—Gerald West’s “African Culture as *Praeparatio Evangelica*: The Old Testament as Preparation of the African Postcolonial.” West begins by pointing out that a strand within African theology has long argued that African culture is Africa’s Old Testament and therefore Africans have had their own preparation for the gospel (that is, the New Testament). This argument is a direct response to missionary-colonialism and its denigration and demonization of African religion and culture. This theological strand in Africa has pointed to the many similarities between the Old Testament (West uses this designation deliberately) and African religio-cultures. Indeed, a comparative approach, pointing to and probing the similarities between African religio-cultural contexts and the Old Testament, has been and remains the dominant form of African biblical scholarship across the African continent. As Justin Ukpong has argued, though the comparative paradigm arises as a reaction to missionary-colonialism, it has also developed a substantive proactive orientation. West’s chapter explores ways in which the Old Testament has made a substantive contribution to the formation of the African subaltern, both religio-culturally and sociopolitically. For while African religio-cultural systems have functioned as African “Old Testaments,” this has never meant that Africans have moved directly to the New Testament, bypassing the Old Testament because they already have their own equivalent. Quite the opposite is the case. The Old Testament has assumed a massive presence in all forms of African Christianity, even those minimally affected by missionaries. West uses as a specific example the use of the Old Testament in Ibandla lamaNazareth (The Congregation/Community of the Nazarites), the

African Independent/Initiated Church founded by Isaiah Shembe in the early 1900s in South Africa, and thriving today in postliberation South Africa. In particular, West's contribution probes the role of the Old Testament in the formation of Isaiah Shembe himself and in his formation of his community. West draws extensively on the primary material produced by Isaiah Shembe himself, and relates this to a re-appraisal of the work of subaltern studies (a return to which is long overdue in biblical studies versions of postcolonialism).

Finally, in "Thus I Cleansed Them from Everything Foreign: The Search for Subjectivity in Ezra–Nehemiah" I offer a sustained example of ideological suspicion that seeks to return class to a significant place in postcolonial analysis. I do so by focusing on the issue of subjectivity, a key feature of postcolonial analyses of colonial identity. How is a person constituted as a subject? What are the specific processes that produce subjects? Barely recognized in the ongoing debates concerning subjectivity (from Althusser to Butler) is that the problem itself arose in response to colonialism and anticolonial struggles from the nineteenth century onwards. The urgent issue was how colonial powers should view colonized peoples, whether they had the full status of citizen-subjects or were, in another use of the term, "subjected" peoples. In light of this background, I argue three points. First, subjectivity is a conservative question, for it postulates a universality of exclusion and not inclusion, a universal subject based on the exclusion of certain criteria and people (I make this point fully aware of the list of credentialed "left" thinkers, however mild or sharp, who have broached the matter of the subject). Second, these patterns of exclusion and identity are codes for class, which slips out of the picture too quickly. Third, in the case of Ezra–Nehemiah we find not only an effort at producing distinct subjects in a colonial matrix, but also a vicious pattern of subject-class formation that, while giving the impression of an inclusive universal, actually operates via an exclusive universal.

The respondents, Richard Horsley and Joerg Rieger, agreed to split the chapters between them, thereby offering cross-pollinating responses. The advantages both bring are due not merely from their respective wealths of experience and reflection, but also because they come from outside Hebrew Bible studies—one is a New Testament scholar, the other a theologian.