

# READING BIBLICAL TEXTS TOGETHER

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# READING BIBLICAL TEXTS TOGETHER

Pursuing Minoritized Biblical Criticism

*Edited by*

Tat-siong Benny Liew and Fernando F. Segovia





**Atlanta**

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2022936081

This volume is dedicated to three of our colleagues, Laura E. Donaldson, David Arthur Sánchez, and Lynne St. Clair Darden, all of whom passed away much too early in their lives and in their careers. We are most fortunate to have the essays by Dr. Sánchez and Dr. Darden in the volume, while we utterly regret that Dr. Donaldson was not able to complete hers for publication. The work of all three always reflected sharpness of vision, excellence in scholarship, and power of commitment. Their voices and faces are, and will be, sorely missed. For their many contributions to the field and to minority biblical criticism, we stand in profound gratitude.



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## Acknowledgments

This volume has been made possible due to the assistance and support of a good number of people, to whom we are deeply indebted and most thankful. First and foremost, to all those who took part in the project, for their gracious acceptance of our invitation and fine contributions. Second, to Dr. Steed Vernyl Davidson, general editor of *Semeia Studies*, for his full support of this project. Finally, to the publications staff of SBL Press, for their assistance throughout the process of publication.



## Minority/Minoritized: A Note

The term *minority* is the designation most often used throughout the volume for both the critical approach under analysis, minority criticism, and the scholars who practice it, minority critics. At the same time, the term *minoritized* is also to be found in both regards. The two designations are synonymous; however, *minoritized* does convey a sense of agency and construction. In effect, when a critic wishes to bring across the sense of relegation to the margins or the periphery, then the term *minoritized* is employed.

A further word of explanation may prove helpful. First, *minority* forms part of an opposition alongside *dominant* to signify the presence of differential formations and relations of power in society and culture. Second, this opposition, dominant-minority, applies across the multiple axes of identity that mark human existence, including that of ethnicity-race. Third, the term *minoritized* emphasizes this relation of domination and subordination, superiority and inferiority, at work in all axes of human identity, whereby one formation erects itself as dominant while casting others as minorities. Consequently, a minority formation is the product of a process of minoritization, whereby that formation has been rendered minoritized by another.

In sum, this volume is concerned with minority ethnic-racial criticism, a variation of ethnic-racial criticism, within the paradigm of ideological criticism in the field of biblical studies. It involves critics who identify, and are identified, with ethnic-racial minority formations in their respective societies and cultures. These critics approach biblical criticism by foregrounding—in one way or another; to some degree or another—the perspective of ethnicity-race, with a focus on the unequal formations and relations of power regarding ethnic-racial identity. This they do with respect to the texts of antiquity, the interpretations of these texts, and interpreters behind such interpretations.

Translation of biblical texts continue to be one of the critical aspects of minority criticism. Some essays in the volume provide direct examples of the authors' engagement with the biblical texts and the struggles around English as the language to communicate the depth of the minoritized experiences. In other cases, authors engage the limitations of modern English language translations. Unless indicated otherwise, English translations of the biblical texts within this volume are taken from the NRSV.

## Abbreviations

1QH	Hodayot or Thanksgiving Hymns
AAP	<i>The African American Pulpit</i>
AARTL	African American Religious Thought and Life
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Freedman, David Noel, ed. <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
AE	<i>Asian Ethnology</i>
A.J.	Josephus, <i>Antiquitates judaicae</i>
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
ALH	<i>American Literary History</i>
ANET	Pritchard, James B., ed. <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
ApNTC	Apostasy in the New Testament Communities
AQ	<i>Adoption Quarterly</i>
ASW	<i>Australian Social Work</i>
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BA	<i>The Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibLib	The Bible and Liberation Series
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BTF	<i>Bangalore Theological Forum</i>
C&S	<i>Church &amp; Society</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CD	Cairo Genizah copy of the Damascus Document
CH	Code of Hammurabi

<i>CI</i>	<i>Critical Inquiry</i>
<i>CrossCur</i>	<i>Cross Currents</i>
<i>CS</i>	<i>Cultural Studies</i>
<i>CSSH</i>	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i>
<i>CTQ</i>	<i>Catholic Theological Quarterly</i>
<i>CTR</i>	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
<i>Di</i>	<i>Dialog</i>
<i>Enc</i>	<i>Encounter</i>
<i>ExpOnl</i>	<i>Expositions Online</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>The Expository Times</i>
<i>Fran</i>	<i>Franciscanum</i>
<i>GLQ</i>	<i>GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies</i>
<i>HACL</i>	<i>History, Archaeology, and Culture of the Levant</i>
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HLLR</i>	<i>Harvard Latino Law Review</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>IC</i>	<i>Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture</i>
<i>ICC</i>	<i>International Critical Commentary</i>
<i>IM</i>	<i>The Irish Monthly</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>IVBS</i>	<i>International Voices in Biblical Studies</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JCO</i>	<i>Journal of Chinese Overseas</i>
<i>JCT</i>	<i>Journal of Constructive Theology</i>
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>The Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JGR</i>	<i>Journal of Genocide Research</i>
<i>JGRSA</i>	<i>Journal of Gender and Religion in Southern Africa</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>The Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JRER</i>	<i>Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series</i>
<i>KJV</i>	<i>King James Version</i>



KTU	Dietrich, Manfred, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín, eds. <i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995.
LD	<i>lectio difficilior</i>
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LitComp	<i>Literature Compass</i>
LS	<i>Latino Studies</i>
LXX	Septuagint
m. Nid.	Mishnah Niddah
MassRev	<i>Massachusetts Review</i>
MT	<i>Masoretic Text</i>
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NEB	New English Bible
Neot	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NIB	Keck, Leander E., ed. <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i> . 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004.
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i>
NLH	<i>New Literary History</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OG	Old Greek
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
PCB	<i>Pacific Conservation Biology</i>
PerTeol	<i>Perspectiva teológica</i>
PJT	<i>The Pacific Journal of Theology</i>
PLJ	<i>The Pacific Law Journal</i>
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
Prot. Jas.	Protoevangelium of James
R&C	<i>Race &amp; Class</i>
RCL	<i>Revista de Crítica Latinoamericana</i>
RenQ	<i>Renaissance Quarterly</i>
RevExp	<i>Review and Expositor</i>

<i>Rom.</i>	Aelius Aristides, <i>To Rome</i>
<i>SAJE</i>	<i>South African Journal of Education</i>
<i>SAM</i>	St Antony's/Macmillan
<i>SASP</i>	Southeast Asian Studies Program
<i>SemeiaSt</i>	Semeia Studies
<i>Sir</i>	Sirach/Ecclesiasticus
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>SocText</i>	<i>Social Text</i>
<i>SP</i>	Sacra Pagina
<i>SPH</i>	<i>Social Process in Hawai'i</i>
<i>SPS</i>	<i>Social Policy and Society</i>
<i>SSQ</i>	<i>Social Science Quarterly</i>
<i>T@C</i>	Texts@Contexts
<i>TCS</i>	<i>Theory, Culture &amp; Society</i>
<i>TL</i>	<i>Tydskrif vir Letterkunde</i>
<i>TLR</i>	<i>Texas Law Review</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>UCLALR</i>	<i>UCLA Law Review</i>
<i>UCLF</i>	<i>The University of Chicago Legal Forum</i>
<i>USQR</i>	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WBC</i>	Word Biblical Commentary

## Introduction



## Minority Biblical Criticism: Reading Texts Together as Critical Project

Fernando F. Segovia

The present volume on reading texts together forms part of an expansive and ongoing project on minority biblical criticism. *Reading Texts Together* is a sequel to the first volume, *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism* (Bailey, Liew, and Segovia 2009), and thus constitutes a second phase of the project. The first phase sought to establish a point of departure for the project. The first volume pursued an incipient conceptualization and formulation of what such a critical undertaking would imply and entail. Now, years later, the second phase seeks to advance the project with a more pointed sense of direction and a more defined sense of integration in mind. The present volume undertakes these goals in the light of two, by no means unrelated, developments: the guiding parameters surfaced in that foundational moment signified by *They Were All Together in One Place?* and the rich trajectory of academic-intellectual production coming to light in the intervening years.

A program unit within the context of the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature has had a formative impact on the production of academic interpretation. This unit was launched as a deliberate and sustained follow-up to that first effort at minority criticism, propelled and chaired by the same individuals who had served as coeditors of the volume, namely, Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia. The unit made its debut at the 2011 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, in San Francisco, under the designation “Minoritized Criticism and Biblical Interpretation.”

The unit’s initial program, it is worth recalling, included two highly successful sessions. One of these was a panel discussion on the topic “Interrogating Minoritization,” which consisted of critical reflections on the process of minoritization. The other was a panel review of an important work

on the tradition of Western crusades, historical and contemporary, against minorities on the part of the West, *We Are All Moors* (Majid 2009). This volume was authored by Anouar Majid, professor of English and vice president for global affairs at the University of New England, and was published in the same year as *They Were All Together in One Place?* (2009). Since that time, and thus for over a decade now, this unit has been addressing all sorts of topics and issues revolving around the task of minority biblical criticism, fostering in the process the goals of this undertaking in highly creative and distinguished fashion.

The present exercise in minority biblical criticism, whose beginnings go back to the work of this program unit, moves the project toward pronounced engagement with texts as well as enhanced interaction among scholars. For the former objective, a set of four texts was selected for analysis, all having the problematic of ethnic-racial identity, by way of dominant-minority formations and relations of power, at the core. For the latter objective, four corresponding sets of critics were formed, all involving representatives from the various ethnic-racial groups. The task assigned was to engage in critical analysis of the texts in question, taking their respective social-cultural contexts and critical-ideological perspectives into account. The questions of how and why were left up to the decision of each critic: in what way they were to approach the text and to what end they were to do so.

In what follows, I address various dimensions of this exercise in interpretation. To begin with, I situate the volume within the context of the ongoing project on minority criticism. This I do in two steps. I start by taking up the question of the whence: looking back at the driving forces behind as well as the noted limitations of its first phase. I continue by addressing the question of the whither, in the light of such limitations: looking ahead to the envisioned trajectory of the project beyond this second phase as well as setting forth the design and goal for this phase, this exercise on reading texts together. Second, I continue with a general presentation of the biblical texts selected for analysis and a pointed explanation for such selection as signifiers for the process of minoritization. To conclude, I set the exercise in broader theoretical perspective, looking at two discussions on and models for such comparative undertakings in minority criticism.

### Reading Texts Together: Whence

At the time of the publication of *They Were All Together in One Place?*, toward the end of the first decade of the century, various strands of

ethnic-racial biblical criticism had already been underway for several decades. This development began with African American criticism, continued with Asian American and Latinx American criticisms, and involved throughout a number of ventures in Native American criticism. In contrast to the others, the latter took place along the lines of individual interventions, rather than as concerted effort. The reason was simply the lack of biblical critics from the indigenous nations and formations of the United States. In laying the foundations for minority biblical criticism, therefore, critics from these various groups took part, except, again, for Native Americans. To have followed the example set years earlier, at the turn of the century, by the volume *Beginning Ethnic American Literatures*—which appeared in the series *Beginnings* put out by Manchester University Press and which included the literary and critical production of all four ethnic-racial groups—would have been splendid (Grice et al. 2001). Alas, however, this was not to be and, quite regrettably, could not be.

Nonetheless, this effort marked a significant breakthrough. Up to this point, the academic-scholarly paths of the various groups had remained virtually independent from one another. Each had given rise by itself to an area of study with an ever more extensive body of literature, an ever more expansive range of interests, and an ever more complex as well as sophisticated set of lines of inquiry. What the project aimed to do, therefore, at its foundational moment was to bring together critics from the various ethnic-racial movements and discourses to ponder the question of minority criticism *as such* and to work together toward this end. The goal was a critical undertaking—a movement and a discourse of its own—that would encompass the various paths at work without displacing, much less replacing, the concerns and objectives pursued by each strand. In other words, the objective was to begin to work together while continuing to work separately.

### First Phase: Driving Forces

A variety of reasons lay behind this impulse toward coalition and dialogue behind the project. Now, in retrospect, with the benefit of more than a decade of hindsight, these can be theorized with much greater acumen and clarity. Three of these I characterize as primary or driving forces behind the launching of the project: challenging established practices, broadening epistemic horizons, and pursuing independent analysis. Each represented a

response to specific aspects of the field that were seen as lacking, in need of critical attention. Each, in turn, signified a corresponding move toward the correction of such perceived deficiencies, by way of redirection or reconstitution of the field.

The first such motivation was a felt pressing need, even after several decades of methodological and theoretical shifts in biblical criticism, to bring about further transformation in the field, both in terms of critical approach and in terms of critical representation. I describe this reason as a quest for voice and inclusion, in resistance to a tradition of silencing and exclusion. Another motivation was a growing desire for greater acquaintance and engagement with the realities and experiences, the movements and discourses, of other minority formations in the United States, following decades of research on and analysis of one's material and discursive reality and experience. This reason I characterize as a quest for universalism and solidarity, in reaction to a habit of particularism and separation. The third motivation was a perceived pressing need, after many decades of swift increase in numbers as well as sustained growth in research and publication, to work together outside the ambit of dominant criticism, varied as these scholars had become by then, both as individuals and as critics. I describe this reason as a quest for freedom and space, in resistance to a history of control and gazing.

With regard to the layout of the field, minority critics grew keenly aware of two persistent drawbacks, despite the far-reaching changes that had taken place since the mid-1970s and the breakup of the consensus of historicism. These drawbacks had to do with lack of access to critical approach and dearth of critical representation. On the one hand, criticism from an ethnic-racial minority lens still remained at the margins of the critical enterprise. Such a situation could be readily explained. From the point of view of the center, whatever happens in the margins is viewed as of interest primarily to the margins. The periphery is, by definition, inferior in quality and import, and hence of little if any concern to the center. On the other hand, criticism with an ethnic-racial minority presence still continued primarily by way of tokenism. This situation could be readily explained as well. From the point of view of the center, dealing with the periphery is relegated largely to the periphery, and for this minimal presence is required. The center, by definition, pursues its own concerns, which are seen as universal, and thus applicable to, indeed imperative for, the margins as well.

With respect to the vision of collaborative work, minority critics became increasingly cognizant of a critical vacuum in their midst,



notwithstanding the many material and discursive changes that had taken place in the United States since the 1960s as a result of the civil rights movement. First, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the Hart-Celler Act, signed by President Lyndon Baines Johnson, abolished the system of immigration by national origins and opened the gates for the arrival of immigrants from outside northwestern Europe. In the decades that followed, the numbers of immigrants to the United States from Africa and the Near East, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean swiftly multiplied. Second, protest movements arose among ethnic-racial groups in the United States, clamoring for civil rights, for justice and liberation. Soon thereafter, critical movements in the academy and the profession followed with a focus on analysis of such groups from a multidisciplinary perspective. Out of such academic-professional movements emerged in time the various strands of minority biblical criticism. It was troubling for critics that they did not know about one another as much as they should have, while facing similar social and cultural problems in the country.

With regard to a plan of action, minority critics remained painfully aware of a critical vulnerability in the pursuit of their craft, despite the vibrant development of their respective strands, the proliferation of scholarship, and the sophistication of such scholarship, since their commencement in the 1980s and 1990s. Not only had exposure to their critical perspectives and their critical voices alike remained under restriction by the center, as noted earlier, but also individual critics and critical angles were subject to tight, though subtle, supervision and observation by the center as well. This state of affairs called for careful attention on the part of minority critics to the various dimensions of their craft: their agendas for research and publication; their approaches to the impartation of the field, its layout and trajectory; and their modes of expression and behavior in academic-intellectual as well as academic-professional contexts. A perceived failure in any one aspect—academic, pedagogical, institutional—could cost them dearly in the advancement of their scholarly lives and careers.

All such circumstances played a role in informing and shaping the project for coalition and dialogue at the start. First, given the enduring sense of provincialism and exoticism attached to their work, minority critics looked to such a collaborative model as a way to exert greater pressure on the field, in terms of wider exposure to their angle of vision as well as greater access to the ranks of the academy and the profession. This strategy would allow critics to continue with their respective lines of inquiry, while presenting

such paths as variations within the same critical movement and discourse. Second, in light of a sharp sense of disconnection from and ignorance of one another, minority critics envisioned this collaborative model as a means to expand their historical and spatial as well as their social and cultural horizons. Thus, instead of taking the center instinctively as the point of reference, they would begin to take one another as points of reference within the same national historical-political context of the United States. Last, given the pervasive sense of examination and evaluation, minority critics looked to this collaborative model as a way to secure a place of their own and forge a way of their own, away from the power and the gaze of dominant criticism. This preferred path by no means implied a decision not to take into consideration methodological and theoretical issues outside the ethnic-racial lens of inquiry. What it did imply was a determination to avoid—at this point in time and for strategic reasons—the inevitable interventions and instructions, the irruption of the traditional reference point, to be expected from the presence of critics from the center.

#### First Phase: Limitations

Despite the success of the first phase of the project, this foundational consideration of minority biblical criticism, its vision and mission, did present a number of limitations. Such is the case, to be sure, with all discursive frameworks at the moment of formation and definition, and this proved no exception. Indeed, these lacunae were identified within the volume itself, a fact that testifies to the critical resolve and thoroughness of this initial effort. Consequently, the second phase of the project, as signified by this exercise on reading texts together, was devised in the light of and in response to such limitations. At this point, these lacunae and moves can be theorized with greater insight and lucidity.

Four of these limitations are named in *They Were All Together in One Place?* Two have to do with the question of scope and representation. First, the project had been conceived solely along the lines of ethnic-racial minorities in the United States. Second, even within the national context of the United States, ethnic-racial minority representation was deficient, given, as highlighted above, the absence of Native American critics. The other two concerned issues of method and theory. First, the vision of minority criticism was not sufficiently addressed, whether in terms of the individual discursive strands or in terms of the collaborative undertaking as such. Second, comparative analysis regarding the use of the rhetorical dynamics

and mechanics of interpretation, whether within the same discursive strand or across the range of such strands, is absent. Other lacunae were identified in the critiques offered by the scholars from other fields of study who served as consultants to the project; these were included as part 2 of *They Were All Together in One Place?* (Bailey, Liew, and Segovia 2009, 311–62).

To begin with, Mayra Rivera Rivera, presently Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Religion and Latinx Studies in the Divinity School at Harvard University, pointed out how, in addressing the problematic of ethnicity-race in texts and interpretations, minority critics had kept altogether silent regarding their religious-theological positions as scholars. It was imperative, she argued, to go beyond questions of method-theory and intersectionality and to be forthcoming about their religious-theological beliefs and the impact of their minority interpretations on such beliefs.

In addition, Evelyn L. Parker, now Susanna Wesley Centennial Professor of Practical Theology in Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University, harped on the need for minority critics to move, in the pursuit of their craft, beyond attention to texts and interpretations. They should include, she urged, critical analysis of the various elements that frame and inform the execution of this task: the historical-political context within which it takes place, the mode and tenor in which it is conveyed, and the political ends that lie behind it. To this, she adds, in a highly insightful comment, the dimension of hybridity. While offered with intergroup material relations in mind, the suggestion can also be taken metaphorically, with reference to intergroup discursive relations.

Last, James Kyung-Jin Lee, presently dean of the Center for the Medical Humanities and associate professor of Asian American Literature and English in the School of Humanities at University of California-Irvine, emphasized the importance of paying attention to the national political context. Thus, he called for careful attention on the part of minority critics to the workings of dominant-minority relations and the character of minority status within the state. Toward this end, he urged critical analysis of the cultural logic at work in the state as well as critical construction of a contrarian cultural logic instead, one that would bypass a simple binary of affirmation or rejection and weigh instead a range of options.

### Reading Texts Together: Whither

The limitations noted proved pivotal in defining the objectives and parameters for the future of the project, not only with regard to its next

and second phase but also with respect to a long-range plan of action, its vision and sequence. While some of these observations and recommendations were integrated into the crafting of the present exercise, reading texts together, others were set aside for later consideration. At this point, this process of planning and selection can be theorized far more sharply and more substantially. In so doing, I proceed from exclusion to inclusion.

### Second Phase: Looking Beyond

I begin with two assessments that, although regarded as of the highest order, have been deferred for subsequent pursual. Both come from the set of external consultants. One has to do with the observation of Rivera Rivera regarding the absence of an explicit religious-theological framework in the project. The other involves the recommendation of Lee for similarly explicit attention to the national-political framework on the part of the project.

Rivera Rivera offered an incisive analysis of the project from the perspective of theological studies, bringing to light its disciplinary, hermeneutical, and theological dimensions; these she described as interlocking and reinforcing. What emerges through this exercise in minority criticism, she argues, with its focus on the problematic of ethnicity-race in interpretation, is a variation of postmodernist hermeneutics and an example of relational theology. Over against the dominant model of historical criticism, grounded in modernist hermeneutics and transcendental theology, the project embodies and advances a construction of God as immanent in creation, worldly and engaged, and of creation itself as relational, complex, and conflicted. For Rivera Rivera, this religious-theological dimension of the project calls for explicit unveiling and analysis.

Toward this end, minority critics face a twofold task. First, they must be forthcoming about their convictions regarding God and creation. Second, they must address the relation between convictions and criticism: the ramifications of beliefs and practices on their work as well as the consequences of lenses and approaches on their stance. I believe that Rivera Rivera is right on target; I argue, however, that the point demands expansion. What she puts her finger on admits of a twofold development. On the one hand, the issue of reticence regarding religious-theological presuppositions in criticism presents another side as well, directly related to the status and role of the Bible. On the other hand, this issue affects not only

biblical criticism but also theological thought, in both a different and a similar way at once.

As Rivera Rivera has observed in this instance, biblical scholars tend not to expose, much less analyze, the religious-theological beliefs and practices that frame and inform their work of interpretation. Yet, in any reading of the Bible, critical or otherwise, there are presuppositions of a religious-theological nature at play. Just as true, I would add, is the failure of biblical scholars to disclose and discuss, by and large, their stance regarding the traditional religious-theological views of the Bible as inspired, revelatory, and normative. Yet, underlying any reading of the Bible, critical or otherwise, such presuppositions are also at work. All such notions, whether regarding God and creation or regarding the Bible, should be put on the table and should be made subject to ideological critique. Why should the religious-theological axis of identity, with its formations and relations of unequal power, be treated any differently from any other such axis, including that of race-ethnicity? Besides, if such exposure and analysis are absent, interpretation proceeds as if in unproblematic fashion.

I add further that theological scholars tend not to reveal, much less scrutinize, the rhetorical-ideological models and strategies that ground and shape their use of the Bible in the work of theological construction. In the process of invoking and deploying the Bible in any model of theological construction, there are presuppositions of a rhetorical-ideological character at play. Further, in the process of such constructions, theological scholars by and large refrain, alongside their critical colleagues, from disclosing and discussing their views regarding the traditional doctrines of revelation, inspiration, and normativity of the Bible. All such conceptions, whether touching on critical approaches or on the nature of the Bible, must be brought out into the open and ideologically dissected. Otherwise, interpretation comes across as unproblematic.

Here a final point is in order. Just as biblical scholars are, on the whole, not much conversant with the trajectory of theological studies, its movements and discussions, so theological scholars prove, by and large, not much knowledgeable regarding the path of biblical studies, its models and issues. Such is the case even though both endeavors represent constitutive areas of study within the field of Christian studies, whether pursued along ecclesial and confessional lines or along secular and humanist lines. One would think that scholars in related areas of studies within the same field would have a greater grasp of one another's framework and discourse, but such, alas, is hardly ever the case. Consequently, if presuppositions

on both sides, theological or critical, are to be openly set forth and critically weighed, the need for greater cross-disciplinary sophistication and dexterity is evident. After all, no less would be asked if the matter concerned other issues of identity—such as gender or economics, sexuality or ethnicity-race, geopolitics, and the like.

Lee advanced an insightful reading of the project from the standpoint of ethnic-racial studies, identifying its particular position, within a range of options open to minority movements and discourses, toward the dominant social-cultural formation; this he defined as centrist. What this exercise in minority criticism reveals, he argues, through its approach to the problematic of race-ethnicity in interpretation is a posture of engaged disconnection. In the face of the dominant national-political logic, the project signifies and promotes a twofold, contradictory sense of unavoidable complicity and determined resistance, avoiding thereby the opposite poles of the spectrum: on one side, a quest for other-assimilation, bowing to the mandate for uniform universalism; on the other, a drive for self-affirmation, rebelling instead for horizontal assimilation. For Lee, this national-political dimension of the project warrants close attention and examination.

In so doing, a twofold task awaits minority critics. To begin with, they must expose and assess the project of the state. Further, in the light of this critique, they must define what their own project as minorities will be, within the ambit of the dominant project, toward the dominant project. I agree wholeheartedly with Lee on this score; however, I believe that the point requires expansion. Such development can proceed along the following two lines. On the one hand, the issue of critical evaluation must be undertaken in broad, comparative fashion. On the other hand, this issue bears a second dimension, imperial-geopolitical, that envelops the first dimension.

There is no question that, from the beginning, the various minority strands of ethnic-racial criticism have taken the social-cultural context into consideration in their work. This they have done in the light of their origins as contextual movements and discourses, in opposition to the erasure of context and the claim to universality on the part of dominant criticism. There is also no question that the joint project of minority criticism had such critical analysis of the social-cultural context in mind. In this regard, both facets, the specific and the collective, are children of the linguistic and ideological transformation in the field. As with all variations of ideological criticism, they pay attention to the differential formations and

relations of power in society and culture in both texts and interpretations. Yet, as Lee has observed in this instance, such a focus on ethnicity-race has not foregrounded the national-political dimension of context in as systematic or sustained a fashion as it should have.

In this project, as well as in the various strands of the undertaking, I agree, a duly informed and persistent analysis of the dominant logic of the state is in order. For this task, I add, it would be incumbent on minority critics to look at various models of this dominant logic, taken from a variety of fields and a variety of pundits. In so doing, critics would engage in ideological critique before opting for a particular model or mixture of models. They would examine and assess the sources and objectives, the rhetoric and the slant, behind such all models. Toward this end, I add, a similarly informed and persistent analysis of the dominant logic of the empire is of the essence as well, since the state in question, the United States, has been and remains an imperial power. Here, too, it would be imperative for critics to look at various constructions of this imperial logic, drawing on a variety of opinions and a variety of commentators. This process would proceed on a similar key of ideological critique, leading to the selection of a particular construction or combination thereof. In both regards, whether as minoritized formations within the state or within the empire, with transnational links to the Global South, minority movements and discourse would then analyze the range of responses open to them and decide on an appropriate path of action toward the development of a contrarian logic.

While both of these observations are regarded as indispensable, neither was adopted as the topic for the next phase of the project. The call of Lee to national-political consciousness and definition within the state was postponed until the third phase, an exercise on "Reading in These Times." In this forthcoming project, minority critics across the board have been asked to reflect on their status and role as biblical critics in the world today, nationally as well as globally. The call of Rivera Rivera to religious-theological awareness and definition in critical interpretation has been postponed until a later phase. What emerged instead is the present exercise on reading texts together.

## Second Phase: On Reading Texts Together

This exercise deviates from the call issued, explicitly or implicitly, by the external consultants to move beyond the traditional concentration on



texts and interpretations—on matters of rhetoric and ideology as well as on issues of method and theory, respectively—in pursuing the task of minority criticism. This was not a call to set these aside as objects of inquiry; it was, rather, a call to amplify them. This exercise was an exhortation to bring other lines of inquiry to bear by placing this task within broader frameworks of reference—religious-theological, public-pedagogical, national-political. What the exercise signifies instead, through deferment of this call, is an abiding concern among minority scholars regarding the question of critical approach. This is a concern with a twofold focus on application and configuration. With regard to the former, it seeks a sharper grasp of ethnic-racial identity in the past—in texts and their contexts. With regard to the latter, it seeks a further fine-tuning of the ethnic-racial angle of vision in the present—in interpretations and interpreters. To put it succinctly, what the exercise signifies is persisting pondering on the dynamics and mechanics of minority criticism.

As such, the exercise conveys the sense that the achievements of the foundational phase regarding the quest captured by its subtitle, *Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, numerous and pathbreaking as they were, are not yet sufficiently polished, and hence that further work is in order regarding both the execution and the forging of minority criticism. Toward this end, as captured by its title, *Reading Biblical Texts Together*, the exercise further signals the conviction that greater interaction is of the essence. The title for this volume signifies that indeed minority critics stand much to gain yet from continuing to focus on texts and interpretations, but that they should do so by working together, through sustained collaborative endeavor. Consequently, the exercise integrates a number of measures designed to promote this goal of increased dialogical interchange at various levels—design, participation, and exchange.

A first set of measures has to do with the layout of the project, the structure of the interaction—a question of method and theory. The desideratum for further work on texts and interpretations I named in my account of the limitations of the project, mentioned earlier. First, I noted that the vision and the mission of minority criticism needed to be unpacked further. Second, I added that such unpacking should include sustained and detailed analysis of the various strategies—the various sets of rhetorical and ideological dynamics and mechanics—activated by minority critics. This the exercise pursues through two procedural strategies. The first was to opt for a set number of texts in which the problematic of race-ethnicity features prominently. Four such passages were selected: two from the



Hebrew Bible, Gen 21:1–21 and 1 Kgs 21; and two from the Christian Testament, John 4 and Rev 21. The second was to have a set of minority scholars from across a range of ethnic-racial movements and discourses analyze each text. All would do so by taking into consideration their own contexts and lenses as minority critics. Thus, interaction is enhanced through a limited repertoire of texts and a broad repertoire of voices on each text.

The second set of measures attends to the roster of the project, the breadth of the interaction—a question of scope and representation. The desideratum for broader constitution I also mentioned in the account of limitations, also listed earlier. First, I brought out the national character of the project and the need to expand the conversation to a global level. Second, I emphasized the absence of Native American participation. These shortcomings the present exercise counters in two ways. On the one hand, it brings a global presence to the table by including the voices of minority critics from outside the United States. This was accomplished in all four sets: Africa and the Middle East—Revelation; Asia and the Pacific—Genesis, 1 Kings, Revelation; and Latin America and the Caribbean—John. On the other hand, it incorporates an indigenous presence as well. Two such voices were secured: one on Genesis and one on Revelation. However, at the beginning of the project, Professor Laura E. Donaldson had to withdraw, for medical reasons, from participation. Thereby, interaction is heightened by the addition of new faces and voices into the project—by no means at the ideal level desired but as a solid step forward nonetheless.

A third and final set of measures has to do with the extent of the project, the degree of interaction—a question of reception and discussion. A desideratum for comparative analysis was conveyed as well in our account of limitations. The analysis of the set of strategies deployed should be carried out in intense comparative fashion, bringing out similarities and differences in the process. This the exercise addresses in two ways. One measure involves the sets of critics. All members of each set comment on the interpretations of the text offered by the other members within the set. This interchange is included in the volume after the essays on each text. The other measure brings in an external critic. I offer a close reading of the dynamics and mechanics of each reading, set by set. The goal is to surface the various positions taken by the critics on texts (ethnic-racial construction advanced and ethnic-racial assessment offered) and interpretations (ethnic-racial context claimed, ethnic-racial lens marshaled, ethnic-racial objective pursued) alike. This comprehensive reading constitutes an exercise in gazing on the lives and labors of

minority critics—not from the outside but rather from the inside. Such gazing bestows on such criticism the attention and significance that it deserves, while presenting such criticism as a comparative foundation for future development. Thus, interaction is enhanced through further internal as well as external engagement.

In what follows, I present the set of biblical texts chosen for analysis and then a number of key insights drawn from the exercise. With respect to the texts, I begin by providing a description of the plot of the literary unit, an account of its position and role within its immediate narrative context, and a sense of its place within the narrative context as a whole. In the light of this background, then, I set forth the reason for selection: the set of elements that make such a literary unit particularly beckoning for ethnic-racial interpretation. With regard to the insights, I limit myself to a summary. This I expand at length in the concluding study, giving such readings the close analysis due as an envisioned foundation for future work.

### Reading Texts Together: Choosing Texts

All social-cultural frameworks, I hold, are crisscrossed by differential formations and relations of power along the multiple axes of identity. This is true across time and space, transhistorically as well as cross-geographically. As such, I also hold that the cultural production of each such framework reflects and conveys, in some mode and to some degree, such unequal divisions and interactions of power along all lines of identity. This is true across the whole range of such production. Consequently, I further hold that each and every component of such production is subject to ideological analysis, that is, a critical study of the power dynamics and mechanics at work in the various axes of identity. This would apply to the entire realm of literary production. The biblical writings are no exception in this regard. They, too, stand as intersected by the entire range of differential formations and relations of power. They, too, are subject to ideological analysis regarding the dynamics and mechanics activated in the representation and wielding of power within all axes.

One such axis of identity has to do with the concepts of ethnicity and race as well as the processes of ethnicization and racialization. Its critical study constitutes the realm of ethnic-racial criticism, which, when practiced from the perspective of minoritized groups, becomes minority criticism. Theoretically, any text, regardless of length, may be analyzed from

the perspective of ethnic-racial criticism in general and minority criticism in particular. No text can escape from the intersectionality of power formations and relations. Practically, however, some texts lend themselves more readily than others to the pursuit of such analysis, given a greater degree of attention or a more explicit mode of presentation, or both, devoted to the ethnic-racial axis of identity. For this exercise in collaborative reading within minority criticism, four such texts have been selected, all of which bear prominently, in different ways, the problematic of ethnicity-race.

#### Genesis 21:1–21: Ishmael the Son of Hagar and Isaac the Son of Sarah

Genesis 21:1–21 depicts the fates, immediate and forthcoming, awaiting the children of Abraham and their respective mothers as promised by God. Their destinies for the future are all-important and reassuring—even if differentially so. These revolve around the covenant of God. A sharp difference in promises is marked: while benefits from God will flow on both, only one shall receive the covenant. Their destinies for the present are quite consequential, but clashing—even if ultimately resolved. These gyrate around the hearth of Abraham. A parting of the ways takes place: a separation steeped in familial conflict, marked by outright expulsion and deadly peril, but guided by divine intervention.

The future fates are dictated as follows. On one side, there is the younger Isaac, the son of Sarah, the wife of Abraham. He is born to her in old age, the result of a covenantal promise by God, in response to her inability to bear children. The covenant of God will continue through him—and his many descendants, as progenitor of many nations. On the other side, there stands the older Ishmael, the son of Hagar, an Egyptian slave of Sarah. He was born to her as a concubine of Abraham, handed over by Sarah for the purpose of procreation and inheritance, given her infertility. Through him—and his many descendants, as progenitor of a great nation—the blessing of God will flow, but not as the conveyor of the covenant.

The present fates are depicted as follows. At the request of Sarah, who seeks to preserve Abraham's inheritance for her son, Isaac, Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael away, with but the barest of provisions, water and bread. Regarding this course of action, God signals approval to Abraham, while reaffirming the promise for Ishmael. While wandering in the wilderness of Beersheba, the supply of water runs out, bringing Ishmael to the point of death and Hagar to despair. Regarding this course of action,

God comes to the rescue of both, revealing a well of water and reaffirming, again, the promise for Ishmael.

As a narrative unit, Gen 21:1–21 forms part of the cycle of stories dealing with the figures of Abraham and Sarah in Gen 12–25. This cycle represents, in turn, the first of three major literary segments that recount the history of Israel's ancestors in Gen 12–50. Within this first segment, this unit brings to a climax the problematic situation created, as related in Gen 16–17, by the existence of the two sons, half-brothers, and the relationship between them—in light of the covenant established between God and Abraham. At issue are its line of inheritance and the transmission of its promises.

The unit sits between two narrative units having to do with the relationship between Abraham and King Abimelech (20:1–18 and 21:22–30). Its structure comprises four literary sections. The plot proceeds as follows: from fulfillment, through conflict and resolution, to fulfillment. The first section functions as the introduction to the story, presenting the birth of Isaac and hence the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah (21:1–7). The second brings to bear, on the celebration of Isaac's weaning, the conflict that leads to the expulsion and separation of Hagar and Ishmael from the hearth (vv. 8–14). The third brings the unit to a climax by showing the consequences of the expulsion: the specter of death for Ishmael and the divine rescue (vv. 15–19). The last section provides the conclusion, revealing, by way of a summary statement, the fulfillment of God's promise regarding Ishmael: his path of life in the wilderness, in the company of God and married to an Egyptian woman, like his mother and selected by her (vv. 20–21).

Genesis 21:1–21 brings to the fore a number of issues that are central to the process of minoritization and hence of interest to the task of minority criticism. Among these, to my mind, one proves fundamental. This is a claim with two sides to it. On the one hand, it posits divine election on behalf of one ethnic-racial group—those who regard themselves as descendants of Abraham through Isaac. On the other hand, it asserts divine relegation to the other, competing group—those who are seen as descendants of Abraham through Ishmael. This latter fate does not signify rejection by any means, not absolute anyway, nor even subordination, not directly anyway. Relegation effectively means, rather, marginalization through distantiation. This claim receives the highest validation, placed at it is on the lips of God, as a character in the narrative. Closely intertwined with it is an account of the differential consequences for the two

formations in question, religious-theological as well as historical-political. From the point of view of divine presence and teleology, one group, the elect, places itself at the center of the world, while confining the other group to its periphery.

Around this bifurcation, a number of other elements central to the program and agenda of minoritization can be found. There is, first of all, recourse to a definition of identity through an oppositional relation of self and other, although not radically so, since the other, in its assigned marginalization, is allowed a connection, foundational as well as ongoing, with the one God. Second, one finds a clear invocation of notions of descent and culture, focused especially on the question of a privileged inheritance and relationship, a covenant. Third, one finds as well the question of aliens, their status and role, within a dominant social-cultural framework, here not only by way of first-generation aliens, and a female alien in particular, but also in terms of the second generation, the mixed issue of natives and aliens. Last, there is the problematic of slavery. This element appears in two ways: first, in terms of sexualized demands placed on women slaves for the benefit of the slaveholder, such as surrogate motherhood; second, in terms of treatment accorded at the hands of their masters, such as summary expulsion and abandonment to fate.

### 1 Kings 21: Naboth of Jezreel and Ahab of Samaria

First Kings 21 presents a conflict over a plot of land that leads to a twofold outcome, one immediate and the other forthcoming. The former takes place within the story itself; the latter is announced within the story but takes place at a later point in the narrative. The land in question is a vineyard in Jezreel. The setting for the conflict is laid out as follows. This is an ancestral plot of land inherited by Naboth, who is clearly a prominent figure in the region. He is thus identified as a native of the area. This vineyard lies contiguous to a palace of King Ahab, the ruler of Samaria, who travels to Jezreel from Samaria (21:1) after having journeyed from Aram to Samaria (20:43). He is identified thereby as an Israelite, but an outsider to this area. A third figure, Jezebel, his wife, is mentioned as residing in the palace. She has been previously identified not only as an outsider to Israel, a Sidonian, but also as a follower of Baal—in effect, she represents the ultimate other.

The plot of the conflict undergoes a threefold development. The point of departure is provided by a frustrated transaction: an offer by Ahab to

acquire the vineyard for use as a vegetable garden, by a mutually agreed-upon exchange, involving purchase or barter; and the rejection of the offer by Naboth on religious-theological grounds, namely, divine interdiction against the sale of ancestral land. Then, an escalation ensues, brought about by the intervention of Jezebel on behalf of Ahab, leading to a first resolution of the conflict. This has nefarious consequences for Naboth—a violent death and an unlawful seizure of the vineyard. Last, the climax is revealed, involving a second resolution of the conflict, through the intervention of God and the agency of the prophet Elijah. This brings nefarious consequences as well—not only for the perpetrators, Ahab and Jezebel, but also for their descendants, the house of Ahab.

As a narrative unit, 1 Kgs 21 forms part of a narrative division having to do with King Ahab of Israel (16:29–22:40). This cycle of stories, in turn, belongs within the expansive narrative segment that follows the beginning narrative of Solomon's accession to the throne and the death of David (chs. 1–2) and the subsequent depiction of the reign of Solomon (chs. 3–11), which ends with the apostasy of Solomon and the division of the kingdom. What follows, then, is a cycle of stories that trace the histories and relations of the split kingdoms, Israel and Judah (chs. 12–22). This cycle begins with Jeroboam in Israel and Rehoboam, son of Solomon, in Judah—the aftermath of a rebellion on the part of the northern tribes. The cycle ends with Ahaziah, son of Ahab, in Israel and Jehoshaphat in Judea. The narrative alternates between the northern and southern kingdoms.

Throughout, the ideological project of the Deuteronomistic History is evident. On the one hand, there is a demand for unyielding allegiance to God and observance of torah, if the blessings of election are to endure. On the other hand, there is a condemnation of any failings in this regard, yielding punishment by God as conveyed through prophetic figures. From this religious-theological optic, all monarchs are subject to denunciation, but the northern kings fare quite badly. King Ahab represents a salient example of this trajectory, and in such portrayal the episode of 1 Kgs 21 plays a major role—royal failure, divine condemnation, prophetic intervention.

Within the set of Ahab stories in 1 Kgs 16:29–22:40, which includes the activity of the prophet Elijah (chaps. 17–19), the unit sits between accounts of Ahab's Aramaean wars in 1 Kgs 20 and 1 Kgs 22:1–40. As it presently stands, the story follows a fivefold structure marked by changes in spatial settings and character interactions. The story moves as follows: vineyard, palace, town, palace, vineyard. At the center of it, therefore, lies the murder of Naboth.

An introductory scene, at the vineyard, presents the encounter between Naboth and Ahab (21:1–3). This represents the beginning of the dispute. The second scene switches the action to the palace (vv. 4–10). The focus moves as follows: a portrayal of a dejected Ahab (v. 4); an encounter between Jezebel and Ahab, wherein she takes the reins of the situation and promises to deliver the desired result (vv. 5–7); and a summary of her plotting in this regard (vv. 8–10). This represents the escalation of the dispute. The central scene moves to the city (vv. 11–14), where the instructions of the queen are carried out by the nobles and elders of the city—Naboth is framed on charges of blasphemy as well as treason and executed. This signifies the resolution of the dispute. The fourth scene returns to the palace (vv. 15–16). Apprised of Naboth's death, Jezebel directs Ahab to take possession of the vineyard, and he sets out so to do. Together, the third and fourth scenes constitute the first of the two outcomes. The concluding scene, at the vineyard, recounts an encounter between Ahab and the prophet Elijah, as bearer of God's judgment (vv. 17–27). This provides a second aftermath of the dispute—the second of the two outcomes.

This final scene is expansive. A beginning subunit opens with the first intervention of God, as relayed to Elijah (vv. 17–19). This subunit discloses the judgment rendered on Ahab for the murder of Naboth and the confiscation of the vineyard: death—keenly symbolic, for in that same vineyard dogs will lick his blood, as they licked that of Naboth. A central subunit relates the encounter (vv. 20–24). The judgment of God is delivered, with expansion on the part of Elijah: the wiping out of the house of Ahab and the death of Jezebel in Jezreel—similarly symbolic, for dogs will devour her body as well. The concluding subunit closes with a second intervention of God, in the light of Ahab's repentance (vv. 27–29). This subunit specifies that the judgment to be rendered on Ahab's house will take place not now but during the reign of his son. Last, a narratorial comment bearing the agenda of the Deuteronomistic History is inserted between the last two subunits: Ahab is singled out as a uniquely evil king, given his following after other gods at the instigation of Jezebel (vv. 25–26).

First Kings 21 reveals a variety of constitutive elements at work in the process of minoritization, all of which are of import for minority criticism. At the heart of it, I argue, stands the representation of the ethnic-racial alien as other within the land of the self. Here the process takes on a radical hue. Thus, Jezebel, the monarch from Sidon, is assigned the role of driving agent of evil behind the move to acquire the vineyard. She it is who is represented as concocting the entire set of measures that are designed



to secure for Naboth, the monarch from Israel, what he on his own was unable to do—the arrangement of false proceedings, the bringing of false charges, and the disposition of murder. Quite related to this core component, one finds the problem signaled by marriage outside the ethnic-racial group, given the threat posed by the alien's worship of other gods and adherence to other values. Such marriages can render ethnic-racial identity awry, with disastrous consequences for all.

Other elements behind the project of minoritization come readily to mind as well. First and foremost, one finds the particular animus displayed toward the presence and influence of the feminine alien, as conveyed here by the severe attribution of unjust and cruel power. Second, there is a distinct appeal to descent and culture, through the tradition regarding the possession of ancestral land and the sale of such property. Third, one finds a problematization of state power, with reference to the pressures and abuses brought by the state over its subjects for the sake of its own desire and profit. Fourth, there is the claim to divine backing for one's ideological stance, as signaled by the intervention of God against the perpetrators of evil and the presence of human agents—prophets—toward this end. Last, one encounters the problematic of divine retribution, which here includes extreme cruelty, not only visited on the actual perpetrators but also on their line of descendants.

#### John 4:4–42: Jesus of Galilee and the Woman and Townspeople of Samaria

John 4 relates a journey of Jesus, in the company of his disciples, to the region of Galilee, by way of Samaria. In the course of this journey, a stop in the region of Samaria takes place. This narrative setting is identified as the town of Sychar and its environs. The story has two phases: it begins by a well outside the town and concludes within the town itself. In both phases, encounters with local inhabitants occur. In the first phase, two such encounters are recorded. The first is developed by way of an extended account of a conversation between Jesus and a woman unnamed, who has come to the well to draw water. The second involves a brief mention of a meeting between Jesus and the townspeople, who have come to see Jesus as a result of the woman's report concerning him, upon her return to town. In the second phase, a sojourn by Jesus in town, at the invitation of the townspeople, is briefly recounted. In all such encounters, the group of disciples is kept largely out of sight.

This narrative setting around Sychar is related directly to the history of Israel's ancestors. In effect, the well is associated with the figure of Jacob,



while the land is identified as a plot passed on by Jacob to his son Joseph. The spatial-geographical context is thus suffused with social-cultural and religious-theological import, as is the story set within it. As such, the stop of Jesus in Samaria brings to the surface the different beliefs regarding the question of salvation as well as the different expectations regarding the future espoused by Jews and Samaritans, set against a common stock of tradition. This stop also shows the reconciliation of these two formations through one and the same bond, the figure of Jesus.

As a narrative unit, John 4:1–41 forms part of a major narrative division of the gospel devoted to the public life of Jesus. The story lies between a prologue (John 1:1–18), as the first division has been traditionally characterized, and a long farewell scene amid his disciples in Jerusalem (John 13–17), the third major division. The plot of the public life (John 1:19–12:50) moves by way of journeys on the part of Jesus, including a number of visits to the city of Jerusalem. The plot also moves by way of mounting conflict between Jesus and adversaries, who are often portrayed as a collective character, “the Jews.” The stop in Samaria forms part of one such journey of Jesus and functions as a break in the emerging conflict.

With regard to the motif of journeys, the stop in Samaria on the way to Galilee is framed by two sets of journeys—one outer and one inner. The outer set involves visits to Jerusalem: John 2:13–3:21 and John 5. The first is motivated by a religious feast, the Passover. The visit begins with the cleansing of the temple and culminates with a lengthy encounter between Jesus and a ruler of the Jews, Nicodemus. The second is triggered by another religious feast, unnamed. The unit starts with a healing on the Sabbath and concludes with a long discourse of Jesus against the Jews. The inner set involves visits linked to previous episodes of the narrative: John 3:22–36 and John 4:43–54. The former is a visit to the countryside of Judea, a region related to the activity of the Baptist. The latter, formally connected to it, is a visit within Galilee, associated with the town of Cana.

With regard to conflict, the stop in Samaria takes place between a first inkling of tension and its full eruption. The first journey to Jerusalem involves a measure of questioning by the Jews, though without outright opposition (John 2:13–3:21). The second, however, is marked by sharp hostility from the Jews, including a plot to eliminate Jesus (John 5). Situated in the middle as it is, the stop in Samaria provides a contrasting place of welcome among the Samaritans of Sychar, who recognize in the person of Jesus the expected figure of the savior of the world.

The unit is developed by way of four literary sections. The first, a summary statement, sets forth the narrative context for the journey, providing a rationale for the move away from the countryside of Judea (4:1–3). The second describes the actual stop of Jesus in Samaria (vv. 4–42). The third, a summary statement, functions as a pivot, bringing to an end the stay in Samaria and resuming the journey to Galilee (vv. 43–45). The final section brings the journey to an end with a return visit to Cana, where a healing of the blind takes place (vv. 46–54).

The long second section exhibits five subsections. The first provides an introduction, describing the narrative setting (vv. 4–6). The second relates the encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well (vv. 7–26). The third provides a joint description of the disciples' return from town, where they had ventured to secure supplies, and the woman's return to town, which leads to the coming of the townspeople (vv. 27–30). The fourth presents an exchange between Jesus and the disciples (vv. 31–38). The fifth functions as conclusion, summarizing the encounter between Jesus and the townspeople—first by the well and then in the city (vv. 39–42).

John 4:4–42 contains a wealth of material having to do with the process of minoritization and related to the pursuit of minority criticism. At its core, I argue, lies the issue of relations between ethnic-racial formations, Jews and Samaritans. This state of affairs is depicted as one of differential separation and standing. This issue is highlighted twice in the unit. First raised by a comment from the narrator, it is provided as an appendix to the first question posed by the woman at the well (v. 9). Its focus is on proper interaction between the groups, and hence the impropriety of Jesus's request from the perspective of the woman. It is subsequently conveyed by a stark declaration on the part of Jesus, uttered in response to a comment made by the woman (v. 22). Its focus is on the differential validity of the religious-theological beliefs in question, and thus the propriety of the Jewish claim in this regard, from the perspective of Jesus.

Around this nucleus, a set of other issues commonly deployed in the ideology and agenda of minoritization gravitate. To begin with, an appeal to descent and culture plays a prominent role, as conveyed above all by a spatial-geographical location immersed in religious-theological tradition. Second, there is a claim to possession of superior knowledge on the part of one formation with respect to the other, and all others for the matter, and hence the need for the other to submit to such epistemic pre-eminence. Third, there is a concomitant claim to privileged access to the divine realm, from which the superior knowledge in question derives, so

that the presence of God is reserved for the one formation. Fourth, one finds a sanction for a mission of conversion, whereby the other formation can attain to superior knowledge and divine presence as well. Last, there is a genderization of the relation between the group formations, along the masculinized superiority represented by Jesus and the feminized submission represented by the woman, and extended to the townspeople as a collectivity. In sum, what this text signifies is a dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, yielding a hierarchical order.

### Revelation 18: The People of God and the Followers of Babylon the Great

Revelation 18 unfolds a vision of the demise and destruction of Babylon the Great at the hands of God. Such fate is conveyed along two rhetorical lines: one involves a series of angelic interventions and revelations; the other employs a series of human lamentations. The vision presents a three-fold sequence: first, authoritative pronouncements from above regarding the forthcoming downfall; then, a variety of responses from below to the fate of the great city; finally, a symbolic representation from above regarding its ultimate destruction. The initial movement lays bare the radically corrupt nature of the city that is responsible for its collapse. The final movement brings out the radically empty state of the city that follows on its annihilation. The middle movement offers, through the eyes of the lamentations, a twofold dialectical contrast. The first has to do with the state of the city: its former splendor and its latter desolation. The second has to do with groups of people. To one side, one finds all those who have shared in and profited from its power and wealth: the kings of the earth, the merchants of the earth, the traders of the seas. These are the followers of Babylon the Great. On the other side, one finds all those who have suffered at her hands and on whose behalf judgment is now rendered: saints, apostles, and prophets. These are the followers of the Lamb.

As a narrative unit, Rev 18 forms part of a larger literary segment encompassing Rev 17:1–19:10, which outlines the judgment of the city. This segment, in turn, is found within the extensive narrative division represented by Rev 12–22, which contains the myth of a holy war. This begins with the attack of Satan as the great dragon (12:1–19:10) and concludes with the conquest of Jesus as the heavenly warrior (19:11–22:21). Within 17:1–19:10, the unit stands as the central component. The unit is preceded by 17:1–18, which lays out the evidence marshaled against the city: its evil ways of being and doing, captured by its characterization as “the great

whore" in 17:2 and as "Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth's abominations" in 17:5. Then, it is followed by 19:1–10, which describes the reaction to the fall of the city among the followers of the Lamb in the heavenly realm: their vindication and rejoicing over its fate.

The unit proceeds by way of narrative vignettes, four in all, beginning with a vision and a solemn utterance of an angel from heaven (vv. 1–3). This is followed by another solemn utterance on the part of a second angel from heaven (vv. 4–8). Next comes a set of dirges involving three groups of people who had previously derived much financial benefit from their alliance with Babylon and who now witness its sudden and total reversal, along with the loss of their previous way of life (vv. 9–20)—kings (vv. 9–10), merchants (vv. 11–17a), and seafarers (vv. 17b–20). The unit ends with yet another vision and solemn utterance of an angel from heaven (vv. 21–24).

Revelation 18 draws on a set of common strategies at work in the process of minoritization, all significant for the work of minority criticism. Primary among them, to my mind, is the dialectical representation of relations between the dominant and the minority formations within a state. This radical opposition is configured not so much along ethnic-racial lines—not explicitly so, anyway—but more along social-cultural and religious-theological lines. Such representation demands, from the point of view of the minority formation, a strict separation between the self and the other. This separation is epistemic and moral, construed in terms of angle of vision and way of life; it may also be physical, envisioned as spatial-geographical distantiation. Such portrayal of the state of affairs is accorded the highest authority in the narrative, conveyed as it is by angelic figures as characters. Behind this strategy, there stand a number of others often marshaled in the project of minoritization.

Two of these are quite prominent, both closely related to this underlying framework, while thoroughly expanding it as well. The first strategy does so by way of globalization. Since the state in question is an imperial state, as signified by Babylon/Rome, the dialectical opposition posited between the minority self and the majority other is depicted as encompassing the world as a whole. As such, the minority self presents itself as under the same duress and the same summons throughout. The second strategy proceeds by transcendentalization or mythologization. The dialectical opposition is further portrayed as a reflection of a similar state of affairs in the heavens, where a cosmological battle is raging between the

figure of Jesus and the figure of Satan—the heavenly warrior and the great dragon. As such, the minority self presents itself as the people of God, the followers of the Lamb, while casting the majority other as the people of Satan, the followers of Babylon/Rome.

Three other strategies are worth mentioning as well. One involves the representation of the other in starkly negative terms, as given to the excesses and corruption of wealth. With it comes a warning: this is a mode of seeing and living that can prove seductive, and from which, therefore, the minority self must distance itself, perhaps even literally so. Another attributes to the other an attitude of hostility and cruelty toward the minority self, a stance that has resulted in the slaughter of many. With it comes irony: the minority self also appeals, by way of exultant visionary anticipation, to extreme hostility and cruelty toward the majority other as well. The last involves the feminization and sexualization of the other, given the casting of the imperial state as a woman and a prostitute, who engages in fornication with all her followers. With it comes replication: this is a representation that adopts the patriarchal ethos of the majority other.

### Reading Texts Together: Broad Theoretical Framework

I conclude by setting the present exercise on reading texts together in broader theoretical perspective. I analyze two models for comparative undertakings in minority criticism. The first such venture I take from outside the project. This model is set forth in the general introduction to a volume titled *Beginning Ethnic American Literatures* (Grice et al. 2001), a critical study of ethnic American literatures authored by four critics. The volume forms part of a series devoted to the introduction of new critical developments in a variety of fields—cultural studies, English studies, and literary studies. While described as practical, these volumes are thorough and sophisticated, fulfilling their intended role as “both an introduction and a contribution to the topic area” discussed (ii). The second venture forms part of this project. This model is outlined in the afterword, titled “Dilemma of (In)visibility? Reading the Bible as Racial/Ethnic Minoritized Scholars,” by Tat-siong Benny Liew. As coeditor of the project, Liew provides a pointed reflection on the critical study of the biblical writings by ethnic-racial minority scholars, addressing in particular the quandary behind the task of reading as minoritized critics.

## Reading Ethnic American Literatures

This introduction to the study of ethnic American literatures—for which I prefer the use of the descriptor *ethnic-racial*—represents a collaborative rather than integrated effort on the part of the authors in question. In effect, these critics are not coauthors as such; they constitute, rather, a set of authors, each of whom is responsible for analyzing a particular ethnic-racial tradition of American literature. Two structural features bring unity to the volume. One is the adoption of the same threefold scheme of analysis regarding each tradition: overview of the historical trajectory, account of the critical discussion, and critical analysis of three major works. The other is the presence of an introduction, brief but solid, by one of the authors, Maria Lauret (2001), in which salient features of the project are identified and theorized. There is no doubt that the project has been well conceptualized and formulated. I comment, in what follows, on the following elements: authorial context, strategic objective, ideological perspective, and theoretical framework.

### 1. Authorial Context

To begin with, the volume constitutes an introduction to ethnic-racial American literatures by outsiders to the United States. First, the authors are not members of the ethnic-racial formations in question: Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Chicanos/as. In addition, they are not natives or migrants to the United States: they do not bear in their minds and bodies the ethnic-racial dynamics and struggles of the country. Last, they are not based in the academic-intellectual world of the United States: they are neither products nor agents (outside teaching stints) of the system. The authors all hail from Europe and have all been based throughout in the academic-intellectual context of the United Kingdom. This arrangement is fully surfaced and owned. Thus, the introduction presents the authors as “cultural outsiders with both a specific and a more general interest in ethnic writing,” and this state of affairs is, in turn, described as unusual for an academic textbook as the turn to four authors “writing about different literatures to a common brief” (Lauret 2001, 2).

At the same time, the volume represents an informed and comprehensive achievement on the part of authors who, though cultural outsiders, are expert voices in ethnic writing in the United States. They are Americanists, that is, trained scholars in the field of American studies. Moreover,

within this field, they are specialists in their respective areas of concentration and assignment: Helena Grice on Asian American literature, Candida Hepworth on Chicano/a literature, Maria Lauret on African American literature, and Martin Padget on Native American literature.<sup>1</sup> Last, they have all spent considerable time in the United States in the course of their research and publication projects—and, in the case of Lauret, teaching as well—and are thus well acquainted, in experiential fashion, with the historical-political, social-cultural, and ethnic-racial dimensions of the country.<sup>2</sup> Such expertise is clearly delineated and set forth as imperative. Indeed, the introduction describes any such task as demanding far more than any “education in mainstream, canonical literature has equipped us for” (Lauret 2001, 6).

Finally, the volume constitutes an engaged rather than descriptive introduction, produced by authors who, as cultural outsiders, pursue their task with various ideological commitments and various political outcomes in mind, rather than assuming a stance of critical objectivity and impartiality in their work. As such, they reflect as well as seek transformation in academic-intellectual terms, as a step toward transformation in social-cultural and historical political terms. This perspective receives explicit delineation and appropriation as well. Thus, the introduction describes such a task as “no parlour game,” but rather as a radical epistemic shift. This shift has a twofold dimension. First, with respect to the traditional perception of American literature, it entails a recognition that the “idea of what American literature is, or can be, will never be the same again” (Lauret 2001, 5). Second, with regard to the received perception of American national identity, it entails a revision of the “the dominant notion of ‘Americanness’” (9).

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1. Helena Grice was lecturer in American studies at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth; she is now senior lecturer in American literature in the Department of English and Creative Writing. Candida Hepworth is described as having been, until recently, lecturer in American studies at the University of Wales, Swansea. Maria Lauret was senior lecturer in American studies at the University of Sussex. She is now professor of American literature and culture in the Department of English, the Doctoral School, and the Sussex Centre for Migration Research. Martin Padget was lecturer in American studies at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth; he is now senior lecturer in English in the Department of English and Creative Writing.

2. This information was kindly confirmed to me by Maria Lauret in a private emessage dated 14 September 2020. For this I am most grateful.



## 2. Strategic Objective

The transformation envisioned is emplaced by way of a conflicted reaction identified in the study of ethnic-racial literatures: a mixture of initial attraction and subsequent distantiation, manifested by outsiders and insiders alike. On the one hand, there is a sense of fascination with both the narrative style and the narrative world presented by such literatures. For outsiders, such writing conveys something novel and different, something appealing, outside the realm of their culture. This would be true of the dominant culture as well as other minority ethnic-racial cultures. For insiders, such writing evokes something traditional and recognizable, something affirming, from within the minority culture itself. On the other hand, there is a sense of disorientation when venturing beyond fascination into analysis. On the part of outsiders, what had proved at first appealing can turn, through critical engagement, into something perplexing and off-putting, something distant, from the standpoint of their culture. This reaction would again apply not only to the dominant culture but also to other minority cultures. For insiders, what had proved initially affirming can turn, through critical engagement, into something stereotypical and distorted, something distant, from the standpoint of their culture.

The volume seeks to address and to assuage this ambivalence, this mixture of attraction and distantiation. This it proposes to do by forging a critical approach that can help to guide this transition. This approach is set forth as follows. First, dealing with ethnic-racial literatures and traditions involves both reading for pleasure and reading for analysis. Further, reading for analysis requires a twofold angle of vision, specific as well as general. With regard to the particular, it calls for a reading of each tradition in its own terms, against the background of "its own distinctive histories and cultural situations" (Lauret 2001, 2). This the individual studies unfold by way of the threefold optic mentioned above: the trajectory of literary production, the path of critical tradition, and the practice of critical interpretation. With regard to the collective, it calls for comparative reading of the various traditions. This the introduction takes up by highlighting a set of elements common to all ethnic-racial literatures. In sum, the problematic mixture of fascination-disorientation can be properly, and creatively, resolved through a sustained process of duly informed and close work. Such a critical project Lauret (2001, 6) describes as a "tall order" indeed.

In attending to the individual reading of ethnic-racial literatures and traditions, Lauret offers two important directives. These involve



the configuration of knowledge and the status of readers. First, it is necessary to transcend the constraining parameters of a mainstream education. This requires delving deeply into the historical-political and social-cultural contexts of minority ethnic-racial literatures: “histories, critical reception, politics, literary traditions and cultural heritages” (Lauret 2001, 6). Such reading retrieves thereby what has remained out of bounds and out of sight for most readers in American studies. Second, it is essential to transcend the narrow horizons of readers. This requires keeping in view, beyond particular histories and cultures, the presence of diversity: differences within each ethnic-racial tradition, common elements among the various ethnic-racial dimensions, and the differential relations to the mainstream on the side of the different ethnic-racial cultures and literatures. Such reading retools readers for intercultural engagement. The end result is transformation for knowledge and reader alike: reconceptualization of the nature and constitution of fields of studies alongside recasting of the vision and mission of critical readers.

In attending to the joint reading of ethnic-racial traditions, Lauret highlights a set of three features in common. These are identified as follows: the burden of representation, the autonomy of identity, and the prevalence of hybridity.

The first element refers to the conflicted character of their discursive and material context in the United States. Ethnic-racial writers are said to perform their task in the face of a historical-political trajectory and a social-cultural gaze that have looked down on their communities and cultures, whether by way of dismissal or denigration. They write, therefore, against a situation of visibility and invisibility: at once viewed through an oppositional angle of vision and rendered unseen in the eyes of this vision. Such is the burden of history that they bear and contest: a representation marked by “racism and ethnocentrism” (Lauret 2001, 7). That is why such writing often takes an autobiographical turn and mode, bestowing significance on the insignificant.

A second component concerns the mode of contestation deployed in the struggle against such oppositional representation from the dominant culture. With the emergence of the ethnic-racial social movements of protest in the 1960s and 1970s, the project of contestation is said to have shifted toward cultural affirmation, which embraced a positive and confrontational vision of ethnic-racial identity. In this project literature had a part to play. This role, however, was by no means clear-cut, but

rather complex. Indeed, affirmation itself proved no less complex. Questions arose regarding the issue of belonging and classification with regard to any one formation. Questions also emerged regarding the issue of intersecting axes of identity across all formations, such as economics and gender. Thus, “any illusion of unified and homogeneous cultural representation” was out of the question (Lauret 2001, 8).

The third element refers to the hybridity that lies at the heart of ethnic-racial formations and cultures. Such hybridity, Lauret argues, permeates literary production as well and does so in any number of ways. Hybridity comes across, first of all, in the widespread use of mixed literary genres and forms as well as cultural themes and tropes. Second, it is also evident in the recourse to characters who are, like the authors, of mixed ancestry as well as to messages and stylistic features targeted at audiences who, like the authors, find themselves differently positioned in society and culture. Third, it is further conveyed, and tellingly so, by the strategy of linguistic mixture, which can range from occasional interjections to substantial deployment of the vernacular. Last, it is signified, most sharply, by the invocation of folklore, myths and narratives from the oral tradition in order to introduce readers to alternative histories and pass on the tradition for the preservation of memory.

### 3. Ideological Perspective

The affirming reference by Lauret (2001, 5) to an observation by Bob Callahan, a poet and publisher, on the meaning of America provides an excellent point of entry into the discussion of ideological edge. Callahan’s comment appears within a discussion on whether the concept of ethnicity has become obsolescent (Reed et al. 1989). This discussion represents the concluding piece to the edited volume on *The Invention of Ethnicity* by Werner Sollors (1989). The import of this comment is that the notion of America is highly complex, insofar as it signifies a diversity of traditions. Five such traditions are identified: Native American, Afro American, Euro American, Asian American, and Hispanic American. Each, Lauret goes on to add, comprises a multiplicity of ethnicities, so that all five traditions represent highly complex categories in their own right.

Within this concept of America as deconstructed, diversified not only in terms of major ethnic-racial formations but also in terms of each formation, two key ideological moves are at work. The first is present already in Callahan: it is what one may call a strategy of relativization. The second is

subsequently advanced by Lauret: it is what one may describe as a strategy of differentiability. The former posits equality in theory among the five major ethnic-racial traditions and literatures identified, yielding a concept of America as decentered. The latter introduces inequality in practice among them, leading to a concept of America as conflicted.

For Callahan, the European American tradition represents one among five major ethnic traditions but in no way figures as quintessential or primary. This point Lauret (2001, 5) takes up by describing all five bodies of literature as “equally worthy of study.” In other words, all five constitute ethnic traditions of literature in America, and no one tradition should hold sway over the others. An introduction to American literature, so the logic of the argument requires, would have to entertain all five traditions and do so in, more or less, equal fashion. This it would have to do, furthermore, without losing sight of the multiplicity inherent in each such tradition. One simply could not undertake the study of American literature by tracing the Euro American tradition, while bypassing or downplaying the others.

For Lauret, expanding on Callahan, it is the case, nonetheless, that one tradition has been and continues to be privileged over the others. In effect, the European American tradition is viewed as having “dominated the definition of American literature,” with the result that the others have been relegated to the margins or banished outside its angle of vision (Lauret 2001, 5). Consequently, such traditions have remained largely unknown. Given this unequal state of affairs, so the logic of the argument demands, the volume opts for sustained attention to the other four traditions of America. The logic emerges thereby as a deliberate attempt to revise the study of American literature by amplification, so that it encompasses all five major ethnic-racial traditions of the country. Toward this end, the volume sets out not only to retrieve but also to study the traditions rendered altogether silent or decidedly peripheral.

In this project of revisionism, further ideological moves are at play, namely, the strategies of unveiling and recasting. This is true with regard to the individual reading of the ethnic-racial traditions. It is no less true with respect to the joint reading of the ethnic-racial traditions.

These strategies can be readily observed in the intense analysis of the separate traditions. On the one hand, such analysis exposes how the study of American literature has been traditionally constituted and practiced—along the dominant line of European American tradition. On the other hand, such analysis demands a reconceptualization and reformulation of

how such study should be grounded and practiced—along the various constitutive lines. Attention to the other traditions individually shows that these authors are American and that each tradition is anchored in the historical-political and social-cultural life of the country.

These strategies can be readily delineated as well in the comparative analysis of the traditions. On the one hand, such analysis exposes the tensions that lie at the heart of the idea of America as a nation of immigrants—the dominant myth of national identity. On the other hand, such analysis reveals a commitment to transformation through a quest for a different, encompassing concept of belonging to America—an alternative myth of national identity. Attention to the other traditions together shows that these authors all seek to move beyond the traditional dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in order to forge a different America, with a dynamic of universal inclusion and the elimination of any idea of center-periphery.

### The Dilemma of Ethnic-Racial Minoritized Scholars

The afterword, on the “Dilemma of (In)Visibility,” focuses on the quandary that minoritized ethnic-racial biblical critics face in the pursuit of their work. Liew offers a critical reflection on the vision and mission of this task in the light of this quandary. With regard to vision, he comments on the question of definition—what may be described as the problematic of positionality, which involves the crafting of the who and the wherefrom. With regard to mission, he comments on the question of procedure—what may be characterized as the problematic of directionality, which involves the forging of the how and the whereto. In what follows, I examine closely what I see as the three key movements of this reflection: the exposition of the dilemma, the articulation of a resolution, and the exposition of implementation. Throughout, Liew appeals to a wide range of theoretical positions and observations for support. This he does in eclectic rather than sustained fashion, hence along punctiliar rather than expansive lines. In each key movement, certain voices and positions emerge as pivotal.

#### 1. Exposition of the Dilemma

The question of positionality is posed in terms of the structural dynamics that are said to govern relations between minoritized ethnic-racial formations and the dominant formation in society and culture. This structural

framework is presented as unequal or differential, involving a dialectical relation of inclusion-exclusion and domination-subordination. This relationship is signified by the opposition visibility-invisibility. In effect, the dominant group renders minoritized groups and individuals invisible, thereby preserving and asserting its own visibility. Such structural dynamics are taken to apply across the board, and thus include the academic-intellectual world as a whole and the field of biblical criticism in particular. As a result, not only the voices and concerns but also the writings and perspectives of minoritized critics remain out of sight and out of mind. Indeed, the critical approach represented by minority criticism—a variation of ethnic-racial criticism and, as such, a movement-discourse within the grand model of ideological criticism—is rendered insignificant and unimportant.

Faced with this dilemma, the question becomes how to respond to such a dialectic of exclusion and domination. This, Liew asserts, minoritized formations did at first, historically, by countering invisibility and asserting visibility in the eyes of the dominant formation. As he puts it, faced by “the experience of and feeling of not being seen, acknowledged, or recognized,” the response becomes “desiring to rise to visibility or to gain recognition.” Such a response led to the development of a politics of identity, which does constitute the first moment of ethnic-racial movements and discourse, the first phase of ethnic studies, in the 1960s and 1970s (Yang 2000; Segovia 2021). In this, he adds, minority biblical criticism followed suit, citing the example of the leading tradition in this regard, African American biblical criticism.

This reaction, however, while quite understandable, proves quite problematic, and this on two counts. First, it is so because the invisibility in question is actually based on visibility. Minoritized individuals and groups are, in fact, hypervisible to the dominant formation. Their somatic and cultural features are keenly perceived, before being dismissed from sight. Similarly, the methodological and theoretical turns of minoritized critics are sharply noted before being relegated to the periphery of scholarship, regarded as unworthy of attention or of interest only to the critics in question. Second, the reaction is also problematic because minority groups and individuals can also be “turned into a spectacle or be placed under surveillance” by the dominant formation. In such a process of gazing, they emerge as essentialist entities, marked by inherent and unchanging features. As such, they become the object of intense watching and typecasting. Likewise, minoritized critics and approaches take on an

aura of essentialism, viewed as objects for observation and encasement, not for actual encountering and engaging.

Given this scenario, Liew reflects on the quest and demand for visibility. In so doing, he offers a critique of visibility as a strategy of identity, following the work of cultural critic Rey Chow, Andrew W. Mellon Distinguished Professor in the Humanities at Duke University. For Chow (2002), any project engaged in the definition of difference can lead to an objectification of identity. Such a turn would give rise to a project of coercive mimeticism, wherein minoritized formations bind themselves not to their representation by the dominant formation but rather to their own self-representation in the face of the dominant perception. In the process, such self-representation would yield positions of essentialism regarding identity and discussions over belonging. These, in turn, would be adopted by outsiders as given and fixed and by insiders as a criterion for inclusion and exclusion. At the same time, the differential relations of power in question would remain unchallenged and unchanged.

## 2. Articulation of Resolution

To move beyond the dilemma, to break through any essentialist definition of difference as identity, Liew proposes a modification of the model of coercive mimeticism identified by Chow. For this purpose, he has recourse to the work of two leading scholars of postcolonial studies and cultural studies, Gayatri Spivak Chakraborty and Homi K. Bhabha. From the former, Liew brings the concept of strategic essentialism to bear, namely, the deployment of essentialist identity as political weapon rather than as ideological principle. This move allows for agency and resistance on the part of the minoritized. From the latter, he draws on the concept of mimicry, namely, the imitation of dominant identity as partial rather than total, born out of the ambivalence of attraction and repulsion. This move makes room for deviation and interruption on the part of the minoritized. In effect, so the argument proceeds, self-representation should convey the power of agency as well as the power of deviation, and, in so doing, function as an exercise in subversive resistance and interruption.

For such a model of strategic mimicry, Liew draws on the work on sexual difference of Luce Irigaray (1993), another prominent cultural theorist, namely, the use of mimesis as a way to bring to the surface the system of "phallogocentrism," the structures and discourses that underlie the systemic oppression of women. Thus, he asks, "Can we ... think, and talk

about a 'strategic mimeticism' or self-mimicry that not only resists but also reveals the structures that minoritize people on the basis of race/ethnicity?" Toward this end, he responds, what is needed is a self-representation of the minoritized that mocks "not only the colonial master's desire for transparent access to 'our' truths but also the colonial master's assumption regarding the correctness or certitude of his truths about 'us.'"

Such a model would include a variety of elements designed to confound the desires for total vision and the assumptions of total knowledge on the part of the dominant formation. Such a model would apply to minoritized biblical criticism as well. In this regard, three key steps are named. To begin with, critics would adopt a notion of the self that is complex and fluid—not unitary and stable. In addition, they would engage in anachronistic juxtapositions of the historical and the contemporary, of the texts and themselves—rather than approach the past as distant and different. Finally, critics would seek expertise across the range of minoritized traditions—not just their own. In so doing, they would learn about how other minoritized formations read the Bible as well as read the Bible along the lines of these other formations, without claiming to be part of them.

The integration of such components into the task of minoritized ethnic-racial criticism would serve to expand critical horizons as well. At one level, it would provide a sense of how the other minoritized formations experience oppression and practice resistance. Such knowledge would allow for the development of collaborative work among the various formations. At another level, it would shift the focus of attention away from the traditional, narrow concentration on the dominant formation and toward a novel, expansive concern for minoritized formations. Such an optic would allow for the development of a politics of identity that would look to such formations for recognition and engagement, and this, in turn, would open the way for the development of coalitions among the minoritized toward transformation.

### 3. Exposition of Implementation

Having charted a way for moving past the dilemma of visibility-invisibility, an alternative definition of difference among minoritized formations, Liew lays out a panoply of paths advanced toward the execution of the model. In so doing, he draws on a number of theoretical positions, all of which espouse, in one way or another, a move toward not only complexity and fluidity but also linkage and engagement in self-representation. All



do so, furthermore, to one degree or another, in the light of the project of multicultural liberalism, whereby the different formations display and celebrate their individual trajectories and constitutions. All such positions Liew sees as having a direct bearing on minority biblical criticism. Of the five cited, one emerges as decisive for the formulation of his own vision.

First, from the work on Asian-African connections of Vijay Prashad, a Marxist intellectual from India, he cites the call for a coalition among ethnic-racial minoritized groups in order to take up the issue of social and cultural inequality that affects all formations, in one way or another. Similarly, from the charter of the Critical Ethnic Studies Association, founded in 2010–2011, he notes the crucial relevance of its various directives. First, the need to engage in critical analysis of oppression and resistance across internal formations as well as external borders. Second, the call to interaction with indigenous studies, thereby making way for analysis of the country as an example of settler colonialism. Third, insistence on critical analysis of the logic of the dominant formation, the project of white supremacy, and its system of racial oppression. Fourth, the need to attend to other dimensions of identity in examining the ethnic-racial axis of identity.

In addition, from the vision of Édouard Glissant, writer and theorist from Martinique, he foregrounds the call for relational analysis in the project of decolonizing. This requires close attention to the constitutive relations that lie behind the racialization of minoritized formations. In effect, the racialization of any one group should be viewed and should be analyzed as tied to the racialization of other groups. At the same time, such racialization should be seen as taking place in complex and shifting ways across time and space, as the dynamics and mechanics of the process itself vary. Further, from the work of Lisa Lowe, an interdisciplinary theorist from the United States, he takes the insight that the process of European modernity entailed a set of related developments, intimacies, across continental lines. Such developments—ranging from colonialism and imperialism, through slavery and indenture, to trade—signified freedom for some and oppression for others as constitutive dimensions of the same process.

This exposition of paths toward alternative self-representation Liew brings to an end and captures with a reflection on another concept advanced by Spivak Chakraborty, namely, “position without identity” (see Hairong 2008). This signifies a turn away from a pursuit of identity to a quest for agency, to be undertaken within the oppositional parameters presented by the differential relations of power at work. As such, this quest emerges as fluid and widespread, since the structural dynamics of



power in question vary, historically as well as spatially. This proposal Liew accepts with a twist.

What he does is to bring together, rather than keep apart, position and identity, so that the pursuit of identity emerges as a positional undertaking. As such, the pursuit of identity on the part of a minoritized formation is viewed as an exercise in agency along relational lines, establishing links with other such pursuits, within the corresponding differential relations of power in place. Thereby the search for identity as positional brings to fruition the move toward complexity and fluidity, linkage and engagement, in self-representation marked as essential in his vision of a way beyond the dilemma and espoused in various ways by the critical voices invoked.

This, then, is what minoritized ethnic-racial biblical critics should also do as they pursue their respective projects in African American, Asian American, Latinx American, or Native American interpretation. As Liew puts it, through emphasis on positional identity, "I am affirming the need to attend continuously to relationality, contingency, historicity, and specificity, so 'we' can be vigilant not only to redefine and refine what or who is minoritized when it is necessary to do so but also to recognize the logic or the relationality of minoritization." The result is a different view of the dilemma represented by the relation visibility-invisibility altogether—not diammetrical opposition, but relational positionality. In so doing, he concludes, minoritized critics can achieve three major objectives. First, they can confound the obsession of the dominant formation for ready access to and full knowledge of the minoritized. Second, they can lay bare structural systems of inclusion and domination throughout, making room thereby for political coalitions among the excluded and subordinated in and across such systems. Finally, they can focus on addressing the structural injustice that lies behind any process of minoritization, including racialization.

### Minority Critics Reading Texts Together as Model

The present project in reading texts together constitutes a comparative exercise in minority ethnic-racial criticism in various respects. The volume brings together not only the various traditions of minority criticism in the United States but also various representatives from each of these traditions. In this work, we draw on a number of minority critics from a variety of spatial-geopolitical and spatial-national contexts around the world. This diverse set of critics comes together in conversation with one another by way of sets, four in all, involving representatives from the

various critical traditions in the United States as well as a representative from a critical tradition outside the United States. The volume focuses such a conversation by having the variety of minority critics interpret biblical texts that have the problematic of ethnicity-race at the core. Having the critics in each set comment on each other's interpretations amplifies this conversation. When placed alongside the two models for comparative projects in minority criticism examined, the project shows much in common with both. A comment on overall context is in order.

The two models examined, I note, are separated by a span of roughly twenty years. The joint volume *Beginning Ethnic American Literatures* was published in 2001, while Liew's essay on "Dilemma of (In)visibility?" appears in 2022 as the afterword to the present volume. The former general introduction to the field approaches the work of minority authors as a writing for transformation. This model is advanced by critical voices who are not ethnic-racial minority critics, either in the United States or in Europe, though well immersed in the study of ethnic American literatures. The latter pointed reflection approaches the work of minority critics as a writing for visibility. This model is offered by a leading voice among ethnic-racial minority critics in the United States, from the Asian American critical tradition though well acquainted with the range of minority traditions, while also well versed in the study of dominant criticism. Much could be said, and should be said, about the three projects taken together as a set of proposals for the pursuit of comparative minority criticism. Here I limit myself to an observation on their emergence within this particular span of two decades at the beginning of the century.

In a piece on the development of Latinx biblical criticism as a dimension of Latinx religious-theological studies, alluded to earlier in reference to the quandary of invisibility highlighted by Liew, I argue that the path of Latinx studies, as a constitutive part of ethnic studies, may be approached in terms of three major stages (Segovia 2021). The first stage, taking up the 1960s and 1970s, would be characterized by a drive for unity and assertion along nationalist lines—it is a phase of formation and definition. A second stage, encompassing the 1980s and 1990s, would be marked by an emphasis on difference and diversity—this is a phase of consolidation and maturation. The third stage, comprising the 2000s and the 2010s, would be characterized by a call to political action, inside as well as outside borders, by way of national unity and pressure and transnational theorization and linkages—it is a phase of transformation and empowerment.

Against this background, the context that underlies the production of these models for comparative work in ethnic-racial minority criticism proves insightful. In what follows, I focus first on the two models advanced by the set of authors and Liew, and then on the model signified by the present project. In the former, I see three driving emphases at work. The first is the need to bring across in minoritized critical traditions the multiplicity of identities and contexts as well as of approaches and interpretations in each tradition. The second is the need for minoritized critical traditions to dissect the structural system of inequality, the dynamics and mechanics of the process of minoritization, which accounts for the emergence of a dominant tradition over a series of minority traditions. The third is the call for minoritized critical traditions to work toward recasting of the state of affairs in the political arena, be it nationally or globally.

With regard to the first two emphases, these models reflect the second stage of ethnic studies, associated with the 1980s and 1990s. In foregrounding multiplicity and exposing domination in doing minority production, both assert and reinforce the methodological and theoretical gains of the final decades of the twenty-first century, as the initial quest for nationalist identity undergoes deconstruction and reorientation. With respect to the third emphasis, these models further reflect the impetus of the third stage of ethnic studies, the 2000s and 2010s. In insisting on recasting, both affirm and reinforce the turn to political pressure and action. This the set of authors does with their eyes set on a redefinition of American literature and the myth of America, while Liew casts a wider glance toward a redefinition of visibility through transnational links, with the Global South particularly in mind.

In the present project, the first two emphases are clearly at work. On the one hand, the sense of multiplicity is evident when one looks at how minority critics approach and interpret one and the same text, whatever the text may be. This sense of diversity is no less telling when one sees how minority critics from the same tradition approach and interpret the different texts in question. On the other hand, the sense of dissection is inescapable when one sees how minority critics do not hesitate in subjecting the dominant tradition to hard scrutiny. This sense of *exposé* is similarly inescapable when one sees how minority critics readily proceed to evaluate and deconstruct the dominant tradition. The third emphasis is by no means absent, but it does remain rather too scattered. Much work remains to be done, therefore, along these lines.

For me, this is the fundamental question: how to marshal all voices and resources toward a vision of an alternative world order. What I have in mind is a world order that would be grounded in and propelled by human rights and social rights for all. A world order that would eschew the dialectics of center and margins, superiority and inferiority, domination and subordination. A world order, therefore, that would refrain from any process of minoritization across all axes of human identity, including the ever-lingering and ever-malignant specter of ethnicity-race. This is a question that this project of minority biblical criticism should address and that remains a desideratum for the future.

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## Genesis 21





## Some Sisters Are No Longer in the Wilderness: Toward an African American Postcolonial Scripturalization of the Hagar Narrative

Lynne St. Clair Darden

How did you feel when you came out of de wilderness, came out of de wilderness, came out of de wilderness?

Did you love your brother when you came out of de wilderness? Did you love your sister when you came out of de wilderness?

—*Slave Songs of the United States*

This essay proposes that the traditional African American reading of the Hagar narrative as exploitation and oppression of African American women may no longer be a viable reading for a segment of African American women who have progressed and continue to progress economically and politically in American society. This essay maintains that African American biblical scholarship must better reflect the issues of the complexity, and not homogeneity, of African American identity. Thus, I maintain that a new task is on the horizon for African American biblical scribes in the twenty-first century and beyond: to caution the community to the challenges and pitfalls involved in accommodating to a sociopolitical system that is founded on social inequality, exploitation, and an unfair distribution of wealth. Therefore, I suggest that there is a need to provide a revised African American scripturalization of the Hagar narrative that better addresses the issues and concerns of the complexity of African American women's identity.

What do I mean by *scripturalization*? The term is derived from the understanding that sacred text cannot be separated from context, and a community cannot be separated from its sacred text. Therefore, it is through the process of scripturalization that the formation, de-formation, and re-formation of a community is made possible. The term implies for

me, therefore, a shift from the interpretation of texts, as the term *African American biblical hermeneutics* or *African American biblical interpretation* denotes, to the more activating sense of writing texts, thereby suggesting the production of a scribe whose pen is an active agent in the conceptualization and reconceptualization of a community and its praxis.

African American scripturalization further signals (1) resistance to homogenization; (2) sensitivity to patterns of imperialism, neocolonialism, and globalization; (3) a fluidity that offers a more complex theorization of identity construction; and (4) a fluidity that, in turn, makes possible a broader conversation that includes African American communities that are not necessarily situated in the conservative, mainstream Black church as well as a wider engagement with the international field of biblical scholars. However, at the same time, such renaming continues to gesture to the field's vital contribution to biblical scholarship: the explicit focus on and critique of the dynamics of race and ethnicity in the United States.

As a means of moving toward this reimagined scripturalization, this essay places in conversation the concepts of postcolonial theory with Delores Williams's (1993) seminal work, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, as a step in moving toward an African American scripturalization of the Hagar narrative that challenges and provokes the ideals of a certain class segment of African American women.

### The Need for Broadening the Task of African American Biblical Scribes

African American biblical scribes typically read text contrapuntally—a way that “give[s] emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented”—to the Euro-American ideological framework in their commitment to challenge a social ethos that promotes inequality as the norm (Said 1993, 66). Generally, their approach to the texts focuses on (1) identifying biblical passages that have special relevance to the community, (2) revealing biblical passages that have been used to keep the community in a marginal location, and (3) recognizing the need for further attention to the history of interpretation within African American religious and cultural traditions (Bailey 2003, 1). In approaching these tasks, they have mainly adhered to a hermeneutic of liberation, striving to revive a diasporic community that has been burdened by displacement, slavery, disenfranchisement, marginalization, and persistent racism.

Vital contributions to the scholarly guild have been made based on the use of this emancipatory framework. This is particularly the case

when liberation hermeneutics is fused with complementary theoretical and methodological approaches that effectively reflect new forms of relevant and constructive praxis. Therefore, in addition to the resources of black liberation theology and womanist theology, scribes must use critical frameworks such as, for example, critical race theory, gender studies, disability studies, and postcolonial studies to frame their work. I suggest that this expanded set of methods is extremely necessary as African American biblical scribes recognize the need for expanding and modifying their goals and objectives in light of twenty-first-century challenges that demand addressing the complexity of African American identity construction.

I am of the opinion that one of these challenges is the susceptibility of estrangement from within the community as a result of class division. Unfortunately, another challenge is the potential for discrimination against other groups as a result of ethnic/racial bias, as a growing segment of African Americans become part of the status quo. By no means am I suggesting a postliberation or postracial sentiment in that the three great beasts of American society—racism, sexism, and economic deprivation—are no longer threats to African Americans. What I am claiming, however, is that scribes must be more intentional in exposing the wily tactics of the beasts by exposing the social diversity within the African American community. This unveiling, which can be viewed as contesting the tenets of liberation theology, and therefore problematic, acts, in my opinion, as a cautionary warning and may in fact aid in guarding a segment of the community from falling prey to the seductions of classism and racism.

I suggest that the supplementation of postcolonial theory—specifically the concepts of hybridity, mimicry/mockery, and ambivalence—blends smoothly with the hermeneutical goals of African American scribes who desire to articulate the complexity of identity construction, since these concepts make it possible to perform a more critical cultural inquiry. The reason for this neat fusion is that postcolonial theory and African American scripturalization are discourses sharing common goals and objectives: (1) revealing the devastating aspects of neocolonialism and the lingering forms of discrimination, inequality, and racism that the system perpetuates; and (2) with reference to womanism and postcolonial feminism, critiquing patriarchy as it aligns with the dominant agenda, including white feminist ideology.

As Homi Bhaba (1994, 247) states, “The intervention of postcolonial or black critique is aimed at transforming the conditions of enunciation at

the level of the sign ... not simply setting up new symbols of identity, new 'positive images' that fuel an unreflective 'identity politics.'” Thus, both disciplines are compatible and enhance each other. Whereas postcolonial studies contributes to African American scripturalization by resituating it out of its local context and placing it into a global conversation, African American scripturalization is ideally situated to reveal the (neo)imperial practices of the United States and unveil how African Americans diversely (as opposed to homogenously) negotiate these practices.

While African American biblical scholars may argue that the term *postcolonial* may be inadequate in speaking of the African American experience of neocolonialism and that W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness actually predates the postcolonial concept of cultural hybridity, nonetheless scholars who are interested in revealing the intersections of cultural domination in both the ancient and the contemporary worlds would view approaching texts via a postcolonial lens as a provocative reading strategy, given its various emphases: (1) the provocation of a Western epistemology that is established on binary thinking, (2) the disavowal of homogeneity and totality, and (3) the theorizing of the complex dynamics of empire, transnationalism, and hybridity within global modes of cultural production, including the circumstances of those on the margins in the United States.

The fusion of African American scripturalization and postcolonial theory presents the opportunity to self-examine the seemingly inherent contradiction of a hybrid identity that is constructed by the double movement of resisting the Western construction of the Other, while simultaneously (and ironically) shifting toward reinscribing the ideological, theological, linguistic, and textual forms of Western power. Therefore, the supplementation of postcolonial theoretical concepts to the framework of African American scripturalization aids in producing a reading strategy that better reflects the often complicated cultural negotiations of a postenslaved community.

Cultural critics refer to what I am expressing as an act of critical conscientization, that is, turning criticism on itself in quest for self-awareness and self-reflection (Bailey, Liew, and Segovia 2009, 31). According to them,

Conscientization moves in two directions, by no means mutually exclusive. On the one hand, it may veer toward questions of critical identity: background and motivation. Rather than engage in criticism in unreflective fashion, the critic pauses to ponder who s/he is as a critic,

whence and why s/he does what s/he does as a critic. On the other hand, it may favor questions of critical role: procedure and objective. Instead of pursuing criticism in abstract terms, the critic halts to reflect what it is that s/he does as a critic. Both paths of questioning are closely interwoven: while the first type of intervention lays the ground for a circumscription of critical task, the second builds on the foundations of critical identity. (3)

As articulated above, I posit that African American scripturalization can be understood as an act of critical conscientization.

“The Strangeness of Home”: The African American Context  
Articulated in a Postcolonial Hermeneutical Key

African American scribes share a cultural context that informs their scripturalizing of the texts which I term “the strangeness of home.” I use the phrase to connote the African American bewildering experience of institutionalized marginalization by Euro-American society, whose biblically informed narration of nation sanctioned a racist and sexist ideology while it simultaneously conceived itself as a democratic nation being founded on biblical narrative and imagery and variously imagined as the new Jerusalem, the promised land, or the city on the hill that is to be a light to the nations. The ambiguous foundation narrative influenced the production of an African American counternarration likewise grounded in biblical imagery that was first articulated by the enslaved and free descendants of Africans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a means of talking back to an oppressive and contradictory society. The mimicking of the rhetorical tools of their oppressors was a way for the enslaved Africans to thoroughly mock the Euro-American self-construction.

For instance, if Euro-Americans identified with Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac in the Abrahamic narratives in positioning themselves as a chosen people who were heirs to the promised land, then the enslaved Africans identified with the Egyptian woman Hagar and her son, Ishmael, to argue that, just like the Euro-Americans, they, too, could identify with the biblical characters and stake a claim in Abraham as an ancestor who, by extension, legitimated their covenantal relationship with the deity and with the land.

This African American tendency to re-present, retell, the narration of nation is why I suggest that African American culture is an exemplum of

Bhabha's notion of performative practice, the recursive strategy used by groups to re-present the national culture differently, ironically, through the integration of the national culture. African American cultural praxis, then, is a culture-specific illustration of Bhabha's (1990, 2) general statement: "Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities." By this "almost the same but not quite" hermeneutical tradition of Euro-Americans, the enslaved Africans challenged the justification of slavery and disenfranchisement. By learning to speak the alien tongue, the enslaved Africans sought to claim a level of power within the context of domination.

"In possessing a shared language, a shared culture," as bell hooks (1994, 170) claims, they were able to construct new cultural identities and find a means to create political and communal solidarity in the development of an African American hermeneutical tradition. Through the strategic use of this rhetorical strategy, the community, over time, morphed into ambivalent African Americans, inaugurating a double-conscious framework that would be the hallmark of their cultural identity—an identity construction that both accepts and rejects, mimics and mocks, the dominant American ethos.

Barack Obama's (2009) first inaugural address, which included an allusion to 1 Cor 13:11, serves as an illustration of the African American hermeneutical tradition. He says:

We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.

For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindu—and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.

Here Obama signifies the African American counternarration that challenged the Euro-American tradition by provoking and challenging America into realizing the potential of an American dream that benefits all, not some. Yet, he also transforms the tradition by extending it past the narrow confines of simply a black and white America. His narration includes voices that have been excluded but have always influenced the story in extremely important ways. Obama's narration of nation points to a new direction that America is moving toward: it alludes to the fact that African American and other communities will continue to make great strides in the future.

However, with this shift in the paradigm, which provides such potential for increasingly larger numbers of African Americans to play important roles in forging a more equal and just society for a greater number of citizens, there is the danger for increasingly large numbers of African Americans to get caught up in the prevalent status quo and to neglect the need to continue to challenge an ethos that is founded on hierarchical racial, ethnic, class, and gender categories. I suggest, then, that there is a possibility that the counternarration no longer mocks the dominant narration but instead mimics it by affirming social stratification, resulting in inequality, economic exploitation, and injustice. I point to Barack Obama's (2013) second inaugural address as an example of this. His rhetorical strategy for this inauguration speech places emphasis on a people who once existed as half slave and half free (or black and white), who are now unified as "we, the people," and who are committed to a sacred narration of manifest destiny that presents the United States as the leader of the free world.

The African American experience resulted in the production of a hybrid, ambivalent African American hermeneutical tradition that, on the one hand, deconstructs hierarchy by illustrating how identity constructions are contradicted by every effort to construct them. Thus, I suggest that the supplementation of postcolonial theory in the theorization of African American identity construction is useful in various regards: (1) dismantling the confining notions of a homogeneous or fixed identity construct, (2) replacing this fixity with a more fluid idea of identity construction, (3) providing concepts thereby that elucidate the complex dimensions of African American identity construction, and (4) assisting thereby in revealing the suppositions/presuppositions that drive the hermeneutical process.

However, on the other hand, because the hermeneutical tradition relies on the rhetorical tools of the oppressor, the counternarration has

within it the seed for morphing into a full-blown mirroring of the oppressive and suppressive ways and attitudes of the status quo. This potential for a full mimicking of the oppressor's ideological viewpoint helps to illustrate that collective cultural memory is not necessarily about recalling past events as accurately as possible, nor about ensuring cultural continuity—it is about making meaningful statements about the past in a given cultural context of the present conditions.

Theorists working with cultural memory maintain that, because individuals learn their collective memories through socialization, they are free to break out of it and offer alternative views of the past, which may later become part of this collective memory. Cultural hybridity makes clear that collective cultural memory need not be monolithic, but that different segments of the community can have different cultural memories based on the diversity of social experiences. The concept also helps us realize that each time we interpret a cultural remembrance there is a distancing from the concrete tie to historical reality, and, therefore, *re-presentation* replaces reality (Pinn 2003, 108–9). For instance, as Anthony Pinn points out, the development of a North American collective cultural memory is an example of memory distortion and loss. He argues that the great potential of early North America created a sense of progress that caused memory to be disassociated from the artifacts. The selective memory of Euro-Americans and their disregard for the past resulted in a shallow self-identity and consciousness that made the denial of both African Americans and Native Americans easy (108–9).

Taking the above into consideration, then, an examination of the Hagar narrative through an African American scripturalization supplemented by postcolonial theory provides a means for a reimagining of how the character Hagar has typically been read within the African American community, a reimagining that takes into consideration the complexity of cultural hybridity.

#### Hagar in the Wilderness Narrative as Representation of African American Women's Experience

For womanist theologians and biblical scholars, no other biblical image could be more appropriate for signifying the plight of African American women in particular, and the African American community in general, than that of the Egyptian woman Hagar in the wilderness. As Renita Weems (1988, 1) comments, “For black women, the story of Hagar in the



Old Testament book of Genesis is a haunting one. It is a story of exploitation and persecution suffered by an Egyptian slave woman at the hands of her Hebrew mistress. For black women, Hagar's story is peculiarly familiar." In particular, Delores Williams's work *Sisters in the Wilderness* presents a comprehensive examination of the striking similarities between Hagar's story and the story of African American women as the framework for articulating a womanist theology. She accomplishes this by adopting the African American hermeneutical tradition of scripturalization, which is the correlating of the experiences of African American women in the United States with that of the biblical character Hagar (and her son, Ishmael) in Gen 16 and 21 (Williams 1993, 2–3). In articulating this correlation, Williams mimics the hermeneutical tradition that was first conceptualized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the enslaved Africans, with their conversion to Christianity during the time of the Great Awakening, copied white evangelicals and began to parallel their experiences with the events narrated in the holy book.

Following the lead of her predecessors, Williams claims in her work that the community needed a narrative, a story, to signify a collective memory of its past as well as to have the imaginative potential for constructing a positive experience of a liberated life. Thus, she turns to the Hagar narratives as symbolization of "women's and the community's past history, present situations and intimations of hope for a better future" (Williams 1993, 118). In paralleling the experiences of Hagar and African American women, she writes,

Hagar's heritage was African as was black women's. Hagar was a slave. Black American women had emerged from a slave heritage and still lived in light of it. Hagar was brutalized by her slave owner.... The slave narratives of African-American women and some of the narratives of contemporary day-workers tell of the brutal or cruel treatment black women have received from the wives of slave masters and from contemporary white female employers. Hagar had no control over her body.... The bodies of African American slave women were owned by their masters.... Hagar resisted the brutalities of slavery by running away. Black American women have a long resistance history of running away from slavery in the antebellum era. Like Hagar and her child Ishmael, African-American female slaves and their children, after slavery, were expelled from the homes of many slave holders and given no resources for survival. Hagar, like many women throughout African-American women's history, was a single parent. (3)

Williams reads the two episodes of Hagar (Gen 16:1a–16 and 21:8–20) to signify how African Americans held various concepts of the wilderness that were based on their complex historical experiences. For instance, she maintains that during the antebellum years slaves had a positive concept of the wilderness, as it was held to be a space of refuge where one received the spiritual strength to rise above oppression. The wilderness was also a space that allowed for the African rites of passage to be practiced, which included being separated from the community and entering into secluded spaces in order to perform the ceremonies (Williams 1993, 112).

However, Williams argues that, postemancipation, the wilderness was experienced as a harsh and hostile space, where African American women had no other option but to enter this oppressive space in order to care for their families. “Thus the black female poet and novelist Frances W. Harper, writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, could speak in her novel *Iola Leroy* of ex-slave women who, like ‘Hagar of Old’ went into the wide, wide, world to make a living for themselves and their children” (Williams 1993, 117). This African American notion of the world as hostile wilderness was similar to the pioneers’ view of the natural wilderness as hostile. Interestingly enough, the African American view countered the Euro-American romantic view at the time that saw the wilderness space as a welcoming space. According to Williams (119), the post-Civil War version of the wilderness emphasized black women’s and the black community’s negative economic experience of poverty and social displacement as black women struggled with keeping the family together due to black male impotence “in relation to the economic straits in which his family found itself.” The dimensions of the postbellum wilderness experience were vast and indefinite in comparison with the more defined and limited dimension of the antebellum wilderness experience. Thus, the post-Civil War wilderness was understood as an uncontainable world, and this space as limited and definite became vague in postbellum consciousness (119).

Williams suggests that, at some point in African American consciousness, this dialectic, this doubling, came together in the appropriation of the biblical Hagar, in which “this Hagar-in-the-wilderness figure began to represent both the *positive antebellum* black religious experience of meeting God in an isolated place and the *negative post-bellum* experience of ‘pioneering’ in a world hostile to African American social and economic advancement” (117).

Williams believes, although she admits that there is no definite proof that the wilderness experiences of the African American were a counter-

narrative to those of the Euro-American, that it does seem “that slave attitudes were often in direct opposition to what mainline culture was projecting about the wilderness at the time” (116). She interestingly illustrates the two diverse expressions of the wilderness Euro-Americans constructed during certain historical moments in time.

She explains that, during the time when the enslaved Africans looked to the wilderness as a welcome space of refuge and freedom, the Euro-American viewed the wilderness as an untamed, savage place that needed to be subdued and civilized. She says,

The wilderness experience, as religious experience, was transforming. Its structure was physical isolation ... establishing a relation between Jesus and slave, healing by Jesus ... and motivation to return to the slave community. So, for the African American slaves, female and male, the wilderness did not bear the negative connotations that mainline white pioneer cultures had assigned to it. (Williams 1993, 117)

Then, when the formerly enslaved Africans began to experience the wilderness as a wild, oppressive, and suppressive locale was the time when Euro-Americans, in attempting to define themselves separate from England, began to consider the wilderness as a place of solace. She writes, “After the Civil War, this African-American notion of the world as hostile wilderness was similar to the pioneer’s view of the natural wilderness as hostile. Interestingly enough, this was a period in America when Romantic views about the wilderness had flourished to the extent that there was great public concern for preserving the wilderness” (117). Euro-Americans were searching for a national and cultural identity, for a way of proudly presenting their country’s assets in relation to those of England and Europe. A distinctive American culture had to be created. It was nation-building time.

Again, Williams admits that there is no definite proof that the African American’s various experiences of the wilderness were an explicit and direct counter to the Euro-American’s various experiences of the wilderness, yet she nevertheless recognizes the juxtaposition of Euro-American and African American experiences.

Williams admits that the Hagar narrative provides a historically realistic model of non-middle-class black womanhood. She frames her scripturalization on “a Christian context of concern for poor black women, children and men immersed in a fierce struggle for physical, spiritual and emotional survival and for positive quality of life formation” (Williams 1993, 196). She reads God’s role in the Hagar narrative as a provider of

survival strategies, not through the lens of liberation theology, in which God acts as liberator of the oppressed. Yet, she is aware that there have been other models of womanhood advocated by educated, elite African Americans in the community. She states, "In the 19th and early 20th centuries educated blacks perpetuated a model of womanhood akin to the Victorian model of true womanhood affirmed and advanced by Anglo-American society which was an exact opposite of Hagar" (123). Educated, upper-class women of both races were identified with the Madonna, who represented the model of true womanhood. Williams's awareness that her scripturalization of the Hagar narrative twenty-some years ago addresses the issues and concerns of a certain group of African American women causes me to claim that her scripturalization did not then, nor does it today, resonate with a segment of women who do not frame their existence as merely survival strategy in an economically, socially, and politically hostile wilderness.

#### Toward a Reimagined African American Scripturalization of Hagar Supplemented by Postcolonial Theory

Therefore, while the two dialectical versions presented by Williams's scripturalization of the Hagar narrative may be historically applicable, I ponder whether either of these satisfactorily addresses the complexity of African American identity in the twenty-first century, especially in terms of class. Perhaps the time has come to move toward presenting an alternative scripturalization of the Hagar narrative, one that better addresses the circumstances and the challenges of cultural hybridity. I appreciate Williams's foresight in acknowledging that, in earlier centuries, upper-class black women and men would not have resonated with the Hagar narrative and would have been more attuned to a scripturalization of the Virgin Mary as an analogy/typology that better addressed their social location, a location that mimicked the Victorian standards of the time and portrayed Mary as the docile, passive mother figure. However, I am of the opinion that the Hagar narrative is one that African American women can and must continue to identify with, especially in terms of cultural memory. I wonder, therefore, just what, beyond the antebellum and postbellum narratives presented to us by Williams, a scripturalization supplemented with postcolonial theoretical concepts would look like.

The character of Haagar in the film *Daughters of the Dust* presents the opportunity to articulate an African American scripturalization of the

Hagar narrative that I believe serves to expose the dangers inherent in a hybrid identity construction. The film details the final days of the Peasant family, a Gullah family living on a Sea Island in the early twentieth century, as they prepare to leave the seclusion of the Sea Island life, which enabled the retention of their African culture, for an integrated life on the mainland, which implies the exposure to and adoption of the ways of the dominant society.

The matriarch, Nana, is the guardian of the ancestral ways who actually practices a blended religious tradition that incorporates the old ways with the way of Western Christianity; thus, Nana represents a hybrid identity construction, in which two cultures collide in the middle or in-between space and in so doing actually form a third space. Nana's blending of the African ways with those of Western tradition is an example of the function of the in-between space, as Bhabha (1994, 9) articulates:

It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed “in-between,” or in excess of, the sum of the “parts” of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)? How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable?

In contrast, Nana's granddaughter-in-law, the widowed, single-parent, strong-willed, and somewhat belligerent Haagar, represents the younger generation, who denounces a life lived in the wilderness and diminishes and dismisses the African traditions and rituals as insufficient, superstitious, and backwards. Out of all of the characters in the film, it is Haagar who has been the most vocal and active in family politics on the island, and, as the film ends, it is Haagar who leads the family out of the wilderness of the Sea Island and into life on the mainland and the inevitable sustained contact with the Euro-American ethos.

On the one hand, the film character Haagar is an exemplum that the biblical Hagar, as Williams argues, does indeed symbolize for African Americans the notion of womanhood as risk taking, independence, and as having the courage to initiate political action. However, on the other hand, the film characterization of Haagar challenges Williams's African

American scripturalization of the Hagar narrative. This Haagar does not see the wilderness of the Sea Island as freedom to practice aspects of African culture, nor does she understand the mainland as a wilderness of suffering and pain. Instead, she sees the mainland as a space of opportunity and a place in which her family can thrive. Haagar's desire to embrace life on the mainland at the extreme of abandoning the experience of living in the wilderness (the secluded Sea Island) signifies the danger of forgetting the oppression experienced by her people and how the collective cultural memory of her community was used to resist that oppression.

Jeanette Rodríguez and Ted Fortier (2007, 1), in their book *Cultural Memory: Resistance, Faith and Identity*, claim that the cultural memory of oppression has two distinct characteristics: (1) the survival of a historically, politically, and socially marginalized group of people; and (2) the role of spirituality as a form of resistance.<sup>1</sup> The authors suggest that the construction of identity is "rooted in religious ideology that manifests a spirituality grounded in experience and is endemic to the continuum of self-preservation and reproduction of humanity" (2). This means that a group's religious ideology can be considered as a tool of resistance and identity construction. Therefore, the religious ideology of an oppressed group, including the acts of ritual and mythmaking that perpetuate that ideology, is a carrier of a cultural memory that fulfills a basic need of survival.

Haagar's beliefs and actions illustrate that, while African American communities have nurtured their cultural production by making sense of their collective cultural memory damaged during years of bondage and continued discrimination, there is not a completely linear transmission of cultural information. Therefore, pieces of cultural artifacts can be lost along the way depending on what groups and individuals consider to be important or unimportant developments. The memory of the past can take on many forms and serve many purposes, ranging from conscious recall to unreflected reemergence, from nostalgic longing to polemical use of the past to shape the present.

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1. The authors present four case studies to advance their suggestions: (1) the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the devotion it inspires among Mexican Americans, (2) the role of recovery and secrecy and ceremony among the Yaqui Indians of Arizona, (3) the evolving narrative of Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador as transmitted through the church of the poor and the martyrs, and (4) the syncretism of Catholic Tzeltal Mayans of Chiapas, Mexico.

I suggest that African American cultural memory is ambivalent: it is split between an urge toward Blackness—conceived in cultural terms—and the continued presence of European cultural ideas (Pinn 2003, 109). Williams's dialectic scripturalization does not take into consideration the cultural crossbreeding of African American identity, which always contains the danger of mimicking an American ethos to the detriment of discarding and thus forgetting past communal experiences. Haagar's desire to fully denounce and forget the past will be detrimental to her survival in the new paradigm shift.

I see the Haagar character as the springboard for an African American scripturalization that provides an opening to articulate the ambiguities, paradoxes, and contradictions inherent in identity construction. Such articulation would prompt the community to critically self-reflect on their own hybrid construction, their repression or nonrealization of their own double consciousness, which may in fact be the cause for their full embrace of the dominant status quo.

An African American scripturalization supplemented by postcolonial studies of the Hagar narrative would act as a cautionary warning of uncritically mimicking the ideological assumptions and methods of the dominant society. Scripturalization would also make the community more critically aware of the slippery nature of the African American hermeneutical tradition, a tradition that was initially used to mock the Euro-American tradition but now has the potential of fully mimicking that tradition, as a paradigm shift occurs within the experience of African Americans.

I suggest that, if the Hagar narrative is not reimagined for many African American women whose lives no longer parallel Williams's dialectic scripturalization, there is the dangerous possibility that these women will become susceptible to identifying with the character Sarai/Sarah in the Genesis stories, because these women, like all Americans, are influenced by a hermeneutical tradition that constructs identity through the embodiment of the biblical text. Thus, shifting from Hagar, the slave woman, to Sarai/Sarah, the slaveholder, may definitely be a possibility. This is especially the case if there is no African American scripturalization that sufficiently addresses the concerns and issues of this growing segment in the community.

Last, I argue, in moving toward an African American scripturalization of the Hagar narrative supplemented by the concepts of postcolonial studies, particularly focusing on Gen 21:1–20, we will need to take into account that this unit, in which it would appear that Sarah has some politi-



cal power, actually illustrates that both Sarah and Hagar live in a world controlled by patriarchy. The entire unit highlights the patriarchal element of power. The sole function of Sarah and Hagar is to operate as child bearers to sons who will inherit the father's property.

For instance, Gen 21:1–7, which focuses on the birth of Isaac by Sarah, represents the first step in the fulfillment of patriarchal promises. Genesis 21:5 states, “*Abraham* was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.” Genesis 21:7 says, “And she [Sarah] said, ‘Who would ever have said to *Abraham* that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have *borne him a son in his old age*.’” In these passages, the emphasis is on Abraham, the patriarch, not Sarah, as matriarch. (In contrast, Gen 16:1–2 emphasizes the character Sarai over Abram, as the text has her say to Abram, “You see that the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave girl so it may be that *I shall obtain children* by her.”)

Genesis 21:9–20 turns to Hagar and Ishmael. After seeing Ishmael playing with Isaac, Sarah requests Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away, for she says, “Cast out this slave woman with her son; *for the son of the slave woman will not inherit along with my son Isaac*” (v. 10). Abraham's response to this request is that of distress, but not distress over having to cast out Hagar and Ishmael. He is distressed over having to cast out his son (v. 11). God says to Abraham in verse 12, “Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman.” Here, God places priority on the male child, and in verse 13 God says, “As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also *because he is your offspring*.” As Hagar and Ishmael are near death because of lack of water, Hagar goes off at a distance and prays to God that she will not have to suffer the terrible experience of seeing her child die before her eyes. The text says, “God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her ‘What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy’” (v. 17), and verse 19b has God say, “for I will make a great nation of *him*.”

### Concluding Comments

Genesis 21:1–20 is a story of the development of patriarchal control and power. Since an important aspect of postcolonial studies and African American scripturalization is critiquing patriarchy as it aligns with the dominant agenda, a reimagined scripturalization of the Hagar narrative would have to address the patriarchal tone in the narrative as a way of



illustrating that an embrace of the dominant ways is extremely dangerous for women, because it will never give women any real power. From this view, women will never ever cause any real, substantial change, because they are merely perpetuating the system.

Genesis 21:1–20 serves a vital role in exposing to this growing segment in the African American community the complexity inherent in a hybrid identity construction with its ability to articulate/illustrate the knotty and slippery cultural negotiations that transpire within that identity construct. Therefore, an African American scripturalization supplemented by postcolonial studies would be effective in making the community critically aware of the dynamics of their ambivalence, because it exposes both the desire for and the resistance to the dominant American ethos. By this exposure it has the possibility to act as a cautionary warning of the dangers of reinscribing the status quo.

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## Aliens, Waterholes, Leagues @ Undersides of Genesis 21

Jione Havea

At the underside of every text are subjects (characters, issues, themes) that are not often noticed or read because they appear to be insignificant. The extent to which those subjects are deemed insignificant depends on the beauty in the eyes of the beholder and the conditions that water (lubricate, tear up) the beholder's eyes. The so-called insignificant subjects, such as the aliens, are in the text waiting to be acknowledged, recognized, embraced, and read. The signifying energies from practices of recognition and acknowledgment are treasured in the circles of native and indigenous peoples (Elvey 2014) and welcomed by postcolonial and cultural critics (Sugirtharajah 2008; Lozada and Carey 2013). When those affirming regards take place, reading proves to be a signifying act. Readers do both: they ignore as well as signify—in signifying some subjects they ignore other subjects, and in ignoring some subjects they exalt preferred subjects. So it has been for Hagar and her son, Ishmael, in the stories of Abraham. Wife Sarah and significant other Hagar, long-awaited Isaac and firstborn Ishmael, moronic Abraham and pushover Abimelech are the usual subjects that critics foreground in their readings of Gen 21. To an extent, those characters could all be identified as dominant as well as minoritized subjects (in terms of gender, class, age, race, or color). As some conservative critics claim to be at *the margins*, the ideological place that Third World critics used to occupy (see Sugirtharajah 1991), so have dominant characters been led into the fields of minoritized subjects.

For many generations, Hagar and Ishmael were insignificant to readers who were driven by Judeo-Christian biases that privilege the lineage of Abraham's secondborn son, Isaac. In more recent years, feminist and womanist readers help lift the ban, so to speak, allowing Hagar and Ishmael to become the dominant subjects in Gen 16 and 21. The genesis of this essay is testimony to how Hagar has become a dominant character.

I started it as a presentation at a session of the Minoritized Criticism and Biblical Interpretation program unit within the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2012, in Baltimore, when i was on a panel invited to present readings of Gen 21.<sup>1</sup> We were not asked to read for Hagar, but all the other presenters focused on Hagar! I, on the other hand, read for subjects who are ignored because of the attention given to Hagar. This essay is therefore testimony that there is more to Gen 21 than Hagar, that there are ignored subjects at the undersides of Gen 21.

At the underside of every reading are ignored subjects, such as the waterholes, that serve as reminders of what burrows beneath the horizon of the text. Put another way, in this essay aliens and waterholes are textual remainders (they are in the text, waiting to be noticed, appreciated, and read) and interpretive reminders (they are tokens that point to the blind spots of ignoring/ignorant readers). Such rem[a]inders are what i have in mind when i speak of and read for minority and minoritized subjects. Complementing the signifying characteristic of reading noted above, i add here that reading for minority/minoritized subjects is creative and releasing—it is creative in its signifying capacity, which releases minority/minoritized subjects from the shadows of ignorance and oversight.

The foregoing ruminations indicate that reading is political, and there is nothing new about this affirmation. Nor is the proposal to read for minority/minoritized human subjects, which is at the core of all hermeneutics of liberation. What then is different about the reading shared in this essay?

First, i attend to the underside of Hagar, an Egyptian (alien) maidservant who used to be a minority/minoritized subject. Whereas Hagar has gained recognition and prominence, other minority/minoritized subjects in Gen 21 remain to be recognized, acknowledged, and read. This essay offers a reading for other aliens at the underside of Hagar.

Second, i also read for nonhuman subjects, such as the waterholes, which are quietly lively in the parched setting of the narrative. Considering the dry context that the narrative constructs, i offer a reading that problematizes how readers discriminate major/dominant versus minority/minoritized subjects. Why do readers continue to ignore the waterholes that are living and life giving in Gen 21 (thus making them major/

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1. I use the lowercase *i* because i also use the lowercase with *you*, *she*, *they*, *it*, and *others*. I do not see the point in capitalizing the first-person when s/he is in relation to, and because of, everyone/everything else.

dominant subjects)? While i share many of the interests of ecological critics, my concern here is not with ecology or the voices of Earth. Rather, i read the waterholes in Gen 21, both in the ground/land and in the bodies of women, as ignored minority/minoritized subjects.

Third, this reading steps over the barriers of individualism by drawing attention to the formation of new links (league, oath, pack) in the narrative. The affirmation of aliens and of nonhuman subjects requires the weaving of alternative relations and of new leagues. Altogether, the attention given to aliens, waterholes, and league in this essay is testimony to the complexity of what counts as subject.

Circling around aliens, waterholes, and the league that Beersheba memorializes, my reading favors an islandish turn (Havea, Aymer, and Davidson 2015). My sympathies are for the peoples of the land, the natives, whom the narrator has written out, except for Abimelech, king of the land, who was conned into giving away a waterhole that he did not dig and into *packing* an alien man (Abraham) who deceived him earlier. The narrator favors Abimelech because of his status—he was the king—which made him different from and set him above the local peoples of the land. The narrator recognized Abimelech as king, but not as a native. My attention to Abimelech, on the other hand, is on behalf of the peoples of the land, hoping that through him the faces of the natives will not be ignored.

My reading thus asks a question that it also problematizes: who are the aliens in Gen 21? The people of the land are aliens in the narrative world, but they are not aliens to the storied wilderness (the world in which the waterhole is a living subject). Abimelech is an alien whose native-hood the narrator ignores. And then there is Abraham, whom the text remembers as an alien but presents as if he were a local.

This essay also digs for how Gen 21 (as text, as story) works on readers, driven by the assumption that Gen 21 has power to con, to trick, readers (Havea and Melanchthon 2016). The way Abimelech is presented in the story is an example of the text's power. I quickly add that i make this claim as someone who reads in a world into which the Bible was brought on what Indigenous Australian theologian Anne Pattel-Gray (1998, 1) calls the "great white flood" (colonization through the partnership of government and church). I read in a setting where the Bible has been used to discriminate, so i am attentive to what the texts of the Bible *do* (in addition to what they *say*), and i am sensitive to attitudes that discriminate and/or privilege because of race and the "color line" (Bailey, Liew, and Segovia 2009, 3–4).

## Splitting Genesis 21

I read Gen 21 as consisting of two stories, 21:1–21 and 21:22–34, linked with the pregnant phrase “at that time” (21:22a). This temporal link is pregnant because there are several points in the first story with which the second story could coincide. The first story ends with two Bible verses (21:20–21) that cover a long period of time, from a boy who was thrown out with his mother after primary wife Sarah saw him having a sexual play—with himself, if one follows the MT (21:9), or with younger Isaac, if one tries to make sense of Sarah’s anger—to that boy having grown up and having been given a wife. To which point in that long stretch of time does “at that time” locate the second story? The text is open to several possibilities. The second story could have been at the time when Ishmael got a wife from Egypt, when he was living in the wilderness, when he was becoming an expert with the bow, or when God was “with the boy” (21:20–21). The temporal reference “at that time,” which is supposed to fix the second story to the first story, is slippery, allowing the two stories to glide away from each other.

My point of focus for this essay is the second story, and it helps my reading if “at that time” refers to “when the water in the skin was gone” (21:15), because water and waterhole hold the two stories together. I do not deny that there are other possible links (which i here choose to ignore!), but i as an islander am drawn to water and waterholes. The story is at once dry and wet. Dry because of the thirsty wilderness setting and wet because of the waterholes; and it does not take a lot of water to make a difference in a dry setting.

There is a limit to the amount of water that Hagar’s skin (vessel) could have held, whereas the waterhole in the ground/land would have been deeper. The difference is about size, and it is not clear whether size and depth matter in the story world. Water and waterhole also draw the dug ground/land into the folds of Hagar’s thirsty body, the juxtaposition of which raises questions about the waterhole in the second story. Was it wet like the waterhole in the first story? Or dry like Hagar’s skin? Did Abraham (in the second story) claim to have dug a well that had water, or was it a dry one (like the one into which Joseph was thrown)? His moving away soon after making the claim gives the impression that the well was not enough to hold him to that place.

In the foregoing ruminations, i split Gen 21 into two stories and at the same time weave the two stories together. Maintaining this kind of tension, to

use a watery image, is the wind in the sails of the ensuing reading. Separation and division do not necessarily lead to exclusion, the obsession of dichotomizing and ignoring readers; rather, separation and division (of stories) are opportunities for relating and reciprocity (between stories), the flows that energize oral cultures. The latter is what i favor in my islandic readings.

There are openings here also for queer reading, bearing in mind that Abraham has been digging around since Gen 12, from Haran to Canaan to Egypt to Gerar and now into the wilderness. In the two stories of Gen 21, waterholes in the ground/land and on the body of a woman inter-flow. The unfolding of queer reading burrows throughout this essay.

### Aliens

Talking about aliens makes one think about home and location. In my case, i can say that i am an alien in Australia because i am a native of Tonga. If i were not native to Tonga, i would not be alien anywhere else. I cannot be an alien without being a native at the same time (Havea 2014). In this regard, no alien is without a place. One becomes an alien when one is away from some place one knows and calls home. This is where Gen 21 is intriguing. It identifies Abraham as an alien, but it does not root him at a home, nor does it locate the setting of the storied events. For me as a migrant worker, Gen 21 reads like the story of many of my folks who have forgotten, or who prefer to forget, their roots and homes. They behave as if there were something shameful about their roots and homes. They take pride in being aliens but do not realize that it is only possible for them to be aliens because they have roots and homes somewhere. The narrator presents Abraham in such a light, as a rootless (which is worse than being uprooted) alien.

The location of the first story is not given. The text gives the impression that it is somewhere in the land of Abimelech, for there is no indication that Abraham has moved from the place where Abimelech returned Sarah to him (20:14). This first story is located somewhere in the land of Abimelech, but it is not in the wilderness of Beersheba (see 20:15). Compare with when i say that i am a Pacific Islander or a native of Oceania. The Pacific Island/Oceania is so wide and complex that my islandish marker slips and slides. The location of the second story is not given either, only that it is at a place where Abraham is an alien (21:23). The juxtaposition of the two stories links the second story with the first story. Abraham is still in Abimelech's land, and it is a wide and broad land.

The second story dislocates Abraham. He is an alien. In Genesis, in fact, Abraham is the prototypical alien. He is the son of a Chaldean who was at Haran when Yahweh called him (Gen 11:31), and biblical memory is unapologetic about his being an outsider to Canaan (see Gen 12:6). He was not from the people of the land, the First Peoples of Canaan. He was actually an alien everywhere he went, whether in the lands of the Aramaeans, the Canaanites, the Egyptians, or the Philistines. In Gen 21, he does not belong where he is, yet he behaves *as if* he were a local. He makes demands and he expects others, including the king of the land, to honor his wishes. He would be an irritation to the First Peoples of any land, as many of us migrants from the islands of Oceania are to the First Peoples of Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australia. Abraham comes across as a minority person who wants to run the land (like Lot in Gen 19), as many foreign colonialists do, and expects the people of the land to go out of their way to accommodate him. Somehow, the narrator thinks that the people of the land want to be displaced by aliens; even worse, that the natives enjoy being displaced by aliens (Rowlett 2000).

Abraham is the minoritizing one in the second story. Abimelech comes with the chief of his troops to check on and to affirm him (21:22–23), and he receives them with a reproach: the servants of Abimelech have seized a well of water (21:25). This is double news to Abimelech, for he was not aware of the doings of his servants and he did not know that Abraham had dug a well. Abraham then quickly moves to establish his claim to the well, to which I return in the next section, but delay here on how Abraham's actions reveal his alienness. My reading is based on a simple premise, built on a migrant's experience: seeking to establish oneself as local is evidence that one is not local, that one is an alien. If one were local, why would one need to argue for one's localness?

The narrator presents the interaction between Abraham and Abimelech as unfolding quickly, with Abraham appearing to have planned his line of action beforehand. That plan, in this reading, was to establish himself as one who belongs in the land. He is a wannabe local, and no one could give him higher validation than Abimelech could—even better that Phicol, chief of the troops, was there to witness the approval of his claim. To use a contemporary migrant experience, if Abraham is seen as applying for naturalization, citizenship, and a passport, he indeed goes to the correct authorities. In this reading, Abraham is shrewd and calculating.

Abimelech approaches (20:22–23); Abraham receives and commits (20:24), and then brings a charge (20:25–26), followed up with gifts and a



bonus of seven ewes he had set aside (20:27–28). Abraham planned things out well, and he knows the power of gifts to oblige. Gifts came the other direction earlier (20:14, 16), from Abimelech to Abraham, with which Abimelech gave Abraham permission to the land (20:15) and to his (Abraham's) wife, who was restored later with "a covering of the eyes" (20:16). Abraham has learned that giving gifts is an opportunity to take land, and he capitalizes on this in 21:28–30. He could (legally) stay among the people of the land. But he is still an alien in the eyes of the text.

The speed and tactfulness of Abraham's move on Abimelech is also evidence of his alienness. In this reading—which says as much about me as it does about Abraham—Abraham's alienness is what drives him. (A caveat is necessary here: not all aliens are like Abraham, and some local peoples are equally conniving.) The second story begins with an oath (21:22–24) and closes with a second one (21:31). Since Abraham swears in the first oath to not deal falsely with Abimelech and his people, the narrator expects readers to believe that Abraham is sincere and trustworthy in the second oath. The narrator expects readers to buy into his story (Amit 2001, 1–10). The surrounding stories, however, urge me to resist. Abraham has not been forthright, and so i wonder whether the narrator is giving the "wink wink" behind the account.

The second story opens with Abraham as an alien, and that does not change at the end. He plants a tamarisk tree, but he is not thereby indigenized. He wants to be but he does not become a Philistine. He remains an outsider who resides in the land of the Philistines a long time afterwards.

The juxtaposition of the two stories takes readers from the undefined location of the first story out into the wilderness, then back to the location of the first story. Genesis 21 is a narrative U-turn. The narrator takes readers back to Abraham, as if to leave Hagar and Ishmael on their own in the wilderness. The narrator is determined to abandon Hagar the Egyptian, who is more than an alien. She is alienated as well.

### Waterholes

In the first story Hagar is shown a well of water that saves her and her child (21:19), and in the second story Abraham claims to have dug a well of water (21:30). Are they the same well, or are the two stories referring to two different waterholes? Did Abraham dig the well that saves Hagar?

There is no indication that the two wells are the same, and at this point i assume that, on the surface of the text, the well that saves Hagar is not the

same as the one Abraham claims to have dug. The juxtaposition of the two stories can thus con readers in two ways: first, into thinking that Abraham is the one who dug the well that saved Hagar, and second, into thinking that Abraham is actually the one who dug the well in the second story. Abimelech falls for Abraham's scam, and the place is named Beersheba, and the two men make a league to seal their agreement.

The pivoting element in the second story is the waterhole that Abraham claims to have dug. Exclusive ownership is important to Abraham, and he makes Abimelech swear to something that he (Abimelech) does not know. Abimelech does not even question his servants or inquire among his people about the well. He accepts Abraham's words; he trusts him. Abraham then marks the transaction by planting a tamarisk tree, which makes him look like a colonizer who raises his flag over discovered land. In this reading, Abraham cons Abimelech, and the narrator tames readers by adding that the place was named Beersheba, and it was there that Abraham invoked "the name of Yahweh, the Everlasting God" (21:33). With such an ending, which overflows with religious and theological sentiments, what reader would question Abraham's claim?

The portion that Abraham claims is a well, which would be as important in the wilderness as it is on an island. While it is easy to dig for water on an island, well water is not always sweet. Surrounded by seawater, island wisdom is needed to locate the place where water is sweet. That place might be in the sea, like at one of the islands in the Vava'u group in Tonga where sweet water springs from the ocean floor so one needs to dive into saltwater in order to collect freshwater. People from outside, including natives from other Tongan islands, would not know where to find freshwater around that island. Thus, it is difficult to drink from the same well in Vava'u if you don't know where freshwater springs in the seafloor. I imagine that it would also be hard to find sweet water in the wilderness (see Exod 15:22–25), and local/indigenous wisdom is necessary. Abraham's claim to have dug the well implies that he possesses local/indigenous wisdom about the flows of the land. As an islander and a migrant, given that Abraham is identified as an alien in Gen 21, i doubt that he possessed the needed wisdom. I can cope with him collecting stones and building altars, but finding water in the wilderness is a different story. So i doubt his claim. The narrator, however, is not an islander, nor does he come across as an indigenous person from among the people of the land.

Abraham's charge shows class and cultural biases. Servants should not seize anything for themselves but only under the authority of their master.

Abraham's accusation against the servants is, therefore, a charge against Abimelech himself. Whether the servants denied Abraham access to the well is not clear, but they were doing what i expect any people of the land to do—use what the land provides. If Abimelech's servants were islanders, i imagine that they would be willing to share the well with Abraham's men. In other words, the servants could have seized the well and still allow Abraham access to it. Sharing of resources is something that relational and reciprocal people do. Abraham, on the other hand, wants exclusive rights. This alien wants to control. This specific waterhole is his, he claims, and it is off-limits to Abimelech and his servants.

The narrator cares about location, but the name of the place that matters for him is the one that Abraham gives, Beersheba (“well of seven/oath”). In stressing the new name, the narrator erases local/indigenous memories about that place. The narrator takes readers to Abraham's camp and metaphorically makes the people of the land depart, pushed out again, to the land of the Philistines (21:32). In the narrative flow, Abraham's claim displaces the people of the land. Yet, then, Abraham follows them to the land of the Philistines. There is something awry about this story: the alien's claim dispossesses the natives, but then he follows them into their displacement. Abraham comes across as the one who likes being displaced and alienated.

The juxtaposition of the two stories in Gen 21 is inviting, if one reads them as stories about Abraham's waterholes. Sarah and Hagar are his waterholes in the first story, and no one doubts that, even though Abimelech seized Sarah (waterhole 1) for a little while in Gen 20. The first story ends with Hagar (waterhole 2) expelled from Abraham's tent, and the second story has Abraham claiming a well of water (waterhole 3). There is something in the juxtaposition of the two stories that turns the women into waterholes, and a well of water into a woman, whom Abraham names Beersheba and plants a tamarisk over/into it. He gives seven ewes (like a bride price) for Beersheba, seven ewes for a “well of oaths.” When oralized, the name Beersheba may be heard as “well of seven [ewes]” or “well of oaths.”

### League

Beer-sheba is the place where Abraham and Abimelech have two pacts (oaths) (21:22–24 and 21:27–31). I suggested above that Abraham cons Abimelech in the second pact, and i turn back here to the first pact. Translations of 21:22b–24 are inviting:

NRSV: “God is with you in all that you do; now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my posterity, but as I have *dealt loyally* with you, *you will deal with me and with the land* where you have resided as an alien.” And Abraham said, “I swear it.”

NJPS: “God is with you in everything that you do. Therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my kith and kin, but will deal with me and with the land in which you have sojourned *as loyally as I have dealt with you.*” And Abraham said, “I swear to it.”

NEB: “God is with you in all that you do. Now swear an oath to me in the name of God, that *you will not break faith with me*, my offspring, or my descendants. As I have *kept faith* with you, so shall you *keep faith with me and with the country* where you have come to live as an alien.” Abraham said, “I swear.”

There is something suggestive in reading the NEB’s “keep faith” with the preference of NRSV and NJPS for being “loyal.” How does Abimelech see his relationship with Abraham? Does Abraham see it the same way? Do these two men see each other as equals, superior, or subaltern? What is obvious here is that in asking Abraham to be loyal/keep faith, Abimelech is expecting him to be disloyal/break faith. This is expected in light of previous interactions between them and the repeated references to Abraham as an alien/sojourner. Despite trying to be local, Abraham is still strange.

Abimelech’s appeal is not just for himself and his descendants, but also for his land (country). This weaving of people with land reflects also the interflowing of women’s bodies with waterholes, as I suggest above, and brings me to the Tongan translation of 21:22b–24, which sensualizes the story:

Ta ‘oku kau ‘a e ‘Otua ma‘au ‘i he me‘a kotoa pē ‘oku ke fai: pea ko eni ke ke fuakava mai heni kiate au ‘i he ‘Otua, ‘Ilo ‘e koe ‘o kapau te ke fai kākā kiate au, pe ki hoku pikilau, pe ki hoku hako! Kae hangē ko ‘eku ‘ofa kiate koe, ke pehē ho‘o fai ‘ofa kiate au, pea mo e fonua kuo ke ‘āunofa ki ai. Pea pehē ‘e Epalahame, Te u fuakava pē.

Back translation: God indeed packs you in everything you do: so commit to me here now in God, for I will know when you cheat me, my children, or my descendants! As I have loved you so may you do lovingly to

[for] me and to [for] the land where you are in transit [sojourning]. And Abraham said, I shall only commit.

Abimelech knows Abraham to be a cheater, and he pleads that he does not cheat his children and the future generations. Abimelech is positive about his love (אהבה; loyalty and faith) for Abraham and demands that Abraham not just love him back but “do lovingly” to him and to the land where he is “in transit” (ʾāunofo). In the Tongan translation, love is in the air. Love is a tricky thing, and to “do lovingly” (fai ʻofa) is even trickier. To “do lovingly” is costly, and requires courage and devotion (Havea 2011).

In the Tongan translation, Abraham is not an alien who seeks to be a local (resident). Rather, he is a sojourner (ʾāunofo) who is in transit, and Abimelech urges him to move on. The best way to “do lovingly” to the land and the people is for Abraham to leave, to get out, to go away. This is what makes sense of Abraham’s conning of Abimelech in the second pact as proposed above, which is in order to root himself as if he were a local indigenous person. In other words, Abraham feels Abimelech’s push, so he tries to establish himself in the land of Abimelech—not as an alien or a sojourner, but as one who has dug a well.

The two packs in Gen 21 are completely political. Two men size each other up and give each a push. A waterhole is named and marked, and Hagar and Ishmael remain in the wilderness. If it were up to the narrator, we would ignore Hagar and embrace (signify) Beersheba. But if it is up to me, we would return Beersheba to the people of the land and recover its nativity, its indigeneity.

### Minoritize This

This essay circles around aliens, waterholes, and leagues, calling attention to subjects that Gen 21 ignores, abandons, excludes, forgets. First, Hagar, a woman, a mother, an Egyptian, a maidservant, is abandoned in the wilderness with what we regard today as her mixed-race son, Ishmael, because the narrator prefers to take readers back to Abraham. A firstborn is abandoned, again, in the interest of the father. That father is the cause of the second case of abandonment—the people of the land, local and indigenous, who are unacknowledged, silenced, and not consulted, as Abraham claims a well of water and renames it as Beersheba. The abandonment of the people of the land causes the forgetting of their ways, their tongues, their names, their land. What happens in/by Gen 21 is symptomatic of

how the Bible works. The Bible ignores, abandons, excludes, forgets, deserts, cons, some people, some subjects. This culture of ignoring is alive in other scriptures, and other cultures, and in many readings of Gen 21.

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## Hagar and the Well in the Wilderness (Genesis 21:9–21)

Ahida Calderón Pilarski

And she [Hagar] departed, and wandered about in the wilderness....  
Then God opened her eyes and she saw a *well* of water.

—Genesis 21:14b, 19a, emphasis added

The minority criticism project aims to explore the realities and experiences behind the work of minority critics, both as diverse groups and as a collective (Bailey, Liew, and Segovia 2009, 5), and the story of Hagar and Ishmael's journey through the wilderness in Gen 21 illustrates the challenge minority critics face in undertaking this exploration. In the wilderness, where wells of water are scarce, Hagar and Ishmael are able to “see” a well (v. 19a), drink from it, and live. The difficulty we minority critics face in our journey in the wilderness reminds us of the importance of reflecting on the *locus* (as an ontological and theological location) of our standing in the field of biblical studies (seemingly a wilderness), and the importance of sustaining hope that we will rediscover and see the life that comes in drinking from our own wells just as Hagar and Ishmael drink from theirs.<sup>1</sup> The dynamics at work in the Gen 21 story about Hagar, a member of a minority group herself, are analogous to those of our standing place as members of a minority and, specifically, as minority biblical critics—in my case as a Latina.

A comparison between Hagar's situation and our own properly begins with an acknowledgment of the theoretical and methodological issues involved and their relevance for minority criticism. Fernando F. Segovia

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1. In recovering this imagery, I honor the early influential work of my compatriot Gustavo Gutiérrez (1984) in his book *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*.

shows the value of such an acknowledgment. In the last few decades, he observes, various minoritized critics have been working to decolonize and liberate the field of biblical studies. At the heart of this process, he explains, are “both theoretical/methodological diversity and sociocultural diversity” (Segovia 2000, xi). A consideration of the current situation/reality of Latina single mothers in the United States can make more vivid the connections between our own situation and that of Hagar in Gen 21. Recent readings of the story of Hagar are also important to the process of decolonization in biblical criticism.

### Distinguishing Theoretical/Methodological and Sociocultural Diversity

Segovia’s distinction between theoretical/methodological diversity and sociocultural diversity is crucial to the general understanding of biblical criticism. This distinction, however, requires a twofold clarification. First, both of these diversities are constituents of biblical criticism; second, to construct a stance, minority critics must erect a theoretical/methodological framework that considers not just minorities but all epistemic subjects, reflecting critically on the dynamics at the basis of these (and other emergent) diversities. I follow Walter Mignolo’s (1991, 103, my translation) definition of theory as “conceptual strategies used to create a framework of reference that allows for the description and explanation of certain phenomena.” Mignolo further distinguishes between hermeneutical subjects and epistemic subjects, and argues that both dimensions are crucial to any critic. The hermeneutical subject is the one who lives in and transmits a cultural heritage, and the epistemic subject is the one who lives in and transmits a cognitive heritage—disciplinary or scientific (106).

Constructing a framework is akin to finding a pathway or pathways in the wilderness. Doing so requires a critical analysis of the state of the field. On the one hand, this analysis should carefully consider and assess the theoretical/methodological perspectives currently applied in biblical studies; and on the other, it should include all epistemic subjects (as hermeneutical subjects): both those using and developing those current perspectives (the dominant groups) and those developing emerging perspectives. All critics need to consciously and responsibly occupy their hermeneutical and epistemic spaces in order to advance the discourse of biblical criticism to the point where diversity is a *sine qua non*, and that they develop a common criterion that prevents the privileging of certain perspectives.

For minority biblical critics, the scarcity of “wells” (i.e., of spaces/platforms for critical reflection about our discipline) recalls Hagar’s difficult journey through the wilderness, but in constructing a pathway through the wilderness, one must remember that the biblical tradition (including the story of Hagar and Ishmael) presents the wilderness also as a place of encounter: encounter with God and with others whom God places in our path. By constructing a theoretical/methodological framework capable of welcoming all the diversity of hermeneutical/epistemic subjects in the discipline of biblical studies, we can create conditions in which such encounters are possible.

### Theoretical Framework

In the introduction to *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, the editors speak about a place, an ontological location, out of which minority critics experience their being a minority as a *double-consciousness* “that enables a vantage point for potential transformation of and against oppression” (Bailey, Liew, and Segovia 2009, 8). Double-consciousness and other concepts like it help to develop a language and terminology that can assist and equip minority critics in recovering the silenced, hidden, and/or oppressed voices in the biblical stories (LeFebvre 1991; Soja 1996; Anzaldúa 1987; DiPietro 2014). Such concepts are also necessary for theorizing and for creating a platform for the proposed larger conversation in biblical studies. Two are particularly helpful: colonial semiosis and border thinking.

The concept of colonial semiosis sheds light on the geopolitical implications both of a historical process of decolonization in general and of the decolonization of knowledge in particular. Walter Mignolo (1992),<sup>2</sup> in one of his seminal studies—*The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Colonization and the Discontinuity of the Classical Tradition*—introduces this concept, which not only illustrates the experience(s) of many minority biblical critics but also can help biblical scholars develop a better understanding of the locus of diversities (see also Mignolo 1995). Allow me this neologism, *discours-ive*, to express the verbal and nonverbal practices that gradually get articulated through discourse. To clarify the comparison that I estab-

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2. I am highly indebted to two esteemed colleagues and friends, Susan Abraham and Pedro DiPietro, for bringing to my attention the incredible work done on this area by Walter Mignolo.

lish through this concept, I replace *semiotic* with *discours-ive* and place it within brackets in the citation. Mignolo (1992, 808) explains that colonial semiosis distinguishes

the fractured semiotic [discours-ive] practices in the colonial periphery resulting from the clash between hegemonic norms and values guiding semiotic [discours-ive] practices in metropolitan centers, their extension to the colonial periphery, and the resistance and adaptation to them from the perspective of the native population to whose historical legacy the European Renaissance was quite meaningless.

This description of colonial semiosis heuristically distinguishes a few aspects of its internal dynamics and at the same time helps in identifying the loci of diverse groups as these may engage in a decolonization process. Colonial semiosis speaks of what is perceived (by the dominant group) as fractured discours-ive practices resulting from the clash between the dominant (colonial) guiding discours-ive practices and those of diverse communities living in the colonial peripheries, showing a spectrum of discours-ive practices going from adaptation to resistance. In the work of Mignolo, a professor of literature and cultural anthropology, one can see that Segovia's reference to the process of decolonization in biblical criticism is certainly not unique to biblical studies; that is, its frontiers are more complex and even global. One could say now that "history is globally moving toward a polycentric world" where, through a process of decolonization, preexisting diversities are gaining their rightful loci in the academic and nonacademic arenas (Mignolo 2009, 163). The view of this process as presented in many discours-ive works (mostly of well-intentioned privileged voices) still reflects the locus of the dominant group, who sees the emerging diversities, or particular others (groups in the periphery and marginalized communities), from the perspective of the "Western universal self" (DiPietro 2014, 12). At this pivoting point, the next concept, border thinking, becomes essential to the proposed larger framework for biblical criticism in general and minority criticism in particular.

Border thinking is a necessary task in the process of decolonization. This concept refers to "the unveiling of epistemic silences of Western epistemology and affirming the epistemic rights of the racially devalued" (Mignolo 2009, 162). Important to distinguish here, Mignolo says, is the essential difference between postmodern and post-Occidental thinking. The dynamics between these two epistemic bodies clarify the borders. While postmodern thinking is "a critique of modernity from the interior

borders,” post-Occidental thinking includes the border thinking that happens “from the exterior borders of the modern/colonial world” (Mignolo 2000, 314). In other words, postmodern criticism of modernity is still a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism, while border thinking “emerges in the exteriority of the modern/colonial world” (215).

This concept helps articulate and visualize the richness and possibilities found in establishing the rightful loci for minority critics in biblical studies. On the one hand, one could argue that the dominant theories and methods in the history of biblical interpretation—even as diverse epistemic paradigms could be identified (Schüssler Fiorenza 2009, 56)—still reflect a Eurocentric perspective. The theories and methods are still helpful in the critical analysis of biblical texts; however, the interpretive process cannot be limited to just the locus (stance) of this perspective. On the other hand, one could also see that the influx of sociocultural diversities in the discipline has brought the emergence of theories and methods, some of which, although they still reflect a postmodern thinking that remains within the interior borders, can nonetheless help minority critics exercise border thinking from a post-Occidental perspective. Thus, minority critics can and should continue their exploration (comparable to a journey through the wilderness) to construct their rightful loci from the exterior borders.

### A Methodological Framework: The Importance of Praxis

Methodology concerns *praxis*, a concept that emerged in Latin America in the 1960s and was at the heart of liberation theology (now influential worldwide). The concept remains relevant for the current conversation on methodology. Praxis was an insight emerging from a post-Occidental experience and perspective, that is, a concept from the exterior borders. When it was eventually applied to biblical studies from the Western perspective, it was categorized as a contextual approach. Yet it is more than just an approach, especially when it is done from the exterior borders. Liberation theology’s point of departure is the life of the poor (or oppressed) in the communities of liberation theologians, and this constitutes the place of theological reflection, *locus theologicus* (see Nickoloff 1996, 30–34, on Gutiérrez). In its emergence in Latin America, this methodological shift marked a stark epistemological break from the European and North American models of doing theology that try to answer questions about rationality and faith. Liberation theology tries “to understand and take an

active part in the real and historical process of liberating the oppressed" (Boff and Boff 1987, 9).

Already in 1971, Gustavo Gutiérrez outlined the main components of this method in his seminal book, *A Liberation Theology*. In 1978 Clodovis Boff (1978, 22–42) systematically articulated the methodology of liberation theology, differentiating the three stages of theological reflection: (1) socioanalytical (or historicanalytical) mediation, (2) hermeneutical mediation, and (3) practical mediation. Boff also made an important contribution to the understanding of this methodology by distinguishing an epistemic locus from a social locus. João Libanio (1992, 154–55) explains Boff's differentiation as follows: an epistemic locus, he says, "deals with the internal rules of knowledge development, and social locus is centered on the interests and commitments of such knowledge. The social locus of a liberation theologian includes a commitment to be with, and to be for the poor." Both are necessary, but in doing border thinking the order matters. The state of the field of biblical studies requires from minority biblical critics (and, by and large, from all biblical critics) an act of epistemic disobedience, namely, "to delink from the illusion of the zero point epistemology" (Mignolo 2009, 160). And this means, Mignolo (162) argues, that "it is not enough to change the content of the conversation.... It is of the essence to change the terms of the conversation." We must reflect on our social locus first.

As a Latina biblical scholar, I see in this concept a methodological element essential for the grounding of minority biblical criticism because it denotes a model of thinking, and not just a method or approach to be learned and domesticated (Bevans 1992, 64). The concept of praxis reflects a model that emerged in the colonial periphery. As a Latina, I agree with Segovia's point that the concept of ethnicity for Hispanic/Latinx persons, although complex, must include a reflection on the Latinx community's roots in Latin America as an important critical element (Calderón Pilarski 2014). This can be illustrated from the contribution of two scholars who incorporate praxis in their discursive works showing traces of a post-Occidental perspective: Ada María Isasi-Díaz's *mujerista* theology and Severino Croatto's practical hermeneutics.

Although not a biblical scholar, Isasi-Díaz is relevant to our discussion because she analyzes gender from a theological perspective, focusing her work on the intersectionality of life conditions of Latinas in the United States, showing the importance of such analysis within the larger reflective framework of life itself (socioanalytical or historicanalytical mediation).

As she describes the three main characteristics of *mujerista* theology, Isasi-Díaz (2005) says that, first of all, it is a liberation theology, which means a theology understood as praxis. She further explains that “to understand theology as praxis means that we accept the fact that we cannot separate thinking from acting,” because theology is a reflective, liberative action (171). The inseparability of the living experience from theological reflection appears in the work of other Latin American and Latinx theologians and biblical scholars, such as María Pilar Aquino, Elsa Tamez, Carlos Mesters, and Severino Croatto. Theological reflection “begins” with the life conditions of the people. Studies have shown that social location influences the way a person (and/or a community) understands the world around her or him, and this can and will shape people’s actions (including the way they read and interpret texts; Simopoulos 2007; Kloppe 2009; Bailey 2002). This element of inquiry paves the way to recast a methodological matrix from the exterior borders in Latinx theologies in the United States, and it calls Latinx and minority biblical critics to consider adequately their connection to biblical interpretation in their reflection.

Croatto (2002), a renowned biblical scholar from Argentina, offers a key insight about the process of biblical interpretation in his book *Hermenéutica Práctica: Los Principios de la Hermenéutica Bíblica en Ejemplos*. Croatto distinguishes in the process of interpreting biblical texts a linguistic level and a *praxical* level. The linguistic level (or dimension) points to the fact that the words in the biblical text were used to interpret events in the life of the communities in the past; in this sense, the linguistic level is instrumental. Yet, in the actualization from experience to word to language in the interpretive process, the text as an instrument preserves the other dimension, which is the praxical. This level refers to the reflective social practices of those past communities in the past (35).

As Croatto (2002, 24–35, 143) lays out his principles of practical hermeneutics, he explains that the Bible is a founding text not because of any official declaration but because of its hermeneutical process of constant development from life. This insight emerging from his contextual reflection reveals an aspect of post-Occidental thinking from the exterior borders. Croatto observes that in the continual and re-creative rereadings of the present communities some biblical events and texts reveal a founding character. He concludes that life itself, the reality from which a community reads the biblical text, is the generator of meaning in the first place (143). The generated meaning, of course, in order to be liberative for all, requires continual critical reflection.

In speaking here *about* the interpretive process and *from* my identity as a minority critic, I, first, share what seems to be a journey through a wilderness, as I connect the few dots (or wells) available to me as a Latina biblical scholar in my own social and epistemological locus. As with Hagar's experience in the wilderness, the scarcity of wells is challenging, but, as I connect (find) dots (wells) in my own reflection, the wilderness has been also a place of encounter. Second, I furnish a path for my reading of Hagar in Gen 21.

### The Story of Hagar in Genesis 21 and Latina Single Mothers in the United States

The work of Tânia Mara Vieira Sampaio, a well-known biblical scholar in Brazil and graduate of the Centro de Estudos Bíblicos, illustrates my approach to the Gen 21 story of Hagar. In choosing the topic of her doctoral thesis, Vieira Sampaio was motivated by her encounter with a community of prostitutes in a barrio in the periphery of São Paulo, Brazil. This is how she describes this first encounter:

[The women] were interested in knowing what the Bible had to say about them, and if it was true that God did not like them [because of their condition], and if the only way to have God's blessing was if they were to abandon the world of prostitution. This is what they heard often from religious leaders ... who called on them for a radical change in their lives as a condition to access the church and God from a "sacred space." To live this life of prostitution for many of these women was not really an option.... It was ... a contingency of their daily world of poverty, and an expropriation of their dignity done by a patriarchal society that condemns prostitution, but uses it, daily, as a space of male pleasure. (Vieira Sampaio 2005, 15–16, my translation)

This context in her social locus guided Vieira Sampaio's articulation of the central questions to be brought to the biblical text. These questions framed her analysis as she put in conversation both the voices of her community and whatever information she could bring from her expertise in applying other methods/approaches to the critical analysis of the text.

When I was teaching an introductory course in biblical studies to a group of Latina local pastors, I had a similar experience that brought new light into my understanding of the Hagar story. While we were discussing the patriarchal narratives in Genesis, someone said, sadly: "There is



not much to tell our communities, especially women, about these patriarchal narratives because the positive theological emphasis is placed on the male characters.” This comment reflects my summary articulation of what was expressed by the group at the time of our conversation. I responded with a question, “What about Hagar?” They said, “Wasn’t she an Egyptian slave who was used as a surrogate mother?” I said, “Yes, but there is more to her story.” I mentioned the work of Tamez (1986) titled “The Woman Who Complicated the History of Salvation.” In my summary, I used the following quotes:

The appearance of Hagar and Ishmael in the patriarchal history is not a simple trick to add suspense or interest to the story.... If this story was gathered through different traditions and included in biblical history, it is because it has a lesson for us. The marginalized demand as first-born sons to be included in the history of salvation. They break the order of things. They complicate history. (132)

Twice Hagar stopped in the desert, and both times the angel of the Lord saved her.... Hagar the slave is the only woman in the Old Testament who had the experience of a theophany.... Strangely enough Hagar gives God a name, the God who sees, because this God saw her oppression and offered her great plans for the future of her son.... It is significant to note the manner in which God addresses Hagar; what we have is the classic form of “annunciation.” We see the elements (“look, you have conceived”); the birth (“and you will bear a son”); the name of the child (“whom you shall call Ishmael”); the significance of the name (“because Yahweh has heard your affliction”); and the future of the son (“he will be a wild-ass of a man, his hand against all, and the hand of all against him, and he will place his tent in front of all his brothers”). (135–37)

In this exchange the group’s organic intellectual wisdom brought to light a relevant life condition in the Latinx community. Their reaction to these quotes was to say, “This message—the fact that God sided with an oppressed woman—will be so significant for single mothers in our communities.” As a matter of fact, two of the women in the class were single mothers. This detour in the stories about the patriarchs in Genesis became the most meaningful event in their summer program. Although we did not have the chance to continue this conversation during the rest of the program, thanks to this brief experience, I became aware of the reality of single motherhood as it reflects a significant group within my Latinx community in the United States.

This conversation opened my eyes to the connections between the core theme of the biblical story and the current actual reality of many Latina single mothers in the United States. This passage is (or can be) an important *well* of water for Latina single mothers as well as for all people, especially minorities, experiencing the difficulties of raising a child in a single-parent household. I decided, therefore, to focus my analysis of this passage on aspects relevant to Latina single mothers, and, in order to know what those significant aspects might be, I first gathered information about the actual realities of this group within my own community in the United States.

### Latina Single Mothers in the United States

For an initial overview of the life conditions of this group, I use two sources: the United States Census data and a research study that focuses on single mothers in North America carried out by the Women of Color Policy Network at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Policy (Chang and Mason 2010). Here I must say, however, that my hope for the future is that this type of analysis will be done more rigorously, because this initial step constitutes the socio-analytical, or historic-analytical, mediation in liberation theology, which is an essential step in praxis. Nowadays, this step ought not to be limited just to the discipline of theology (including all its subdisciplines; biblical studies is not an exception) but should be an interdisciplinary enterprise. The interdisciplinary analysis must include in the conversation experts in the appropriate and necessary fields (sociology, psychology, economics, social work, human development, education, neuroscience, public policy, etc.). My vision for future graduate programs in theology is that all degrees will be dual degrees, so that students will be trained and equipped in at least two fields. This enterprise can contribute in two ways. On the one hand, it can help in the planning of concrete transformation of the identified problems; on the other hand, it can help to empower people, including those members of faith communities for whom the promise of salvation includes a call for greater justice in this world and the restoration of human dignity.

The Women of Color Policy Network research study indicated already that over eighteen million children in the United States live in households headed by single women (Chang and Mason 2010, 5). This number, in combination with the 2010 and 2019 data from the United States Census Bureau, makes the situation of minority single mothers a matter of great concern. The census shows that, in 2010, 2.7 million Hispanic women were

heads of household (including all related categories: separated, widowed, divorced, and never married). In 2019, this number increased to 12.6 million. The census does not report how many dependents live with those women. So, even if some of the women in 2010 had only one child living with them, there were as many as seven million children in all their households, if not more (a considerable percentage of the total number of children [eighteen million] living in households headed by single women in 2010). In 2019, that number of children in Hispanic households would be as high as twelve to thirteen million. Now, in a population of sixty million plus Hispanics in the United States, twenty-four million people (counting mothers and children)—that is, about 30 percent of the Hispanic population—are living in this condition. Why does it matter? Because the life conditions of this group are accompanied by other alarming factors.

The Women of Color Policy Network 2010 report shows also that in the last few decades the wealth gap in the United States has increased tremendously, to such an extent that “the top five percent of income earners in the United States have more wealth than the remaining 95 percent of the population” (Chang and Mason 2010, 5). More strikingly, when the wealth gap is racialized, a more notorious gap comes to light. “Latinos and African-Americans hold only a fraction of the wealth of whites ... [that is] for every dollar of net worth of white Americans, Latinos have 9 cents and African-Americans have 7 cents” (5). When we add gender to the mix, the picture is even more dramatic: “households headed by single women mothers are more likely to live in poverty and have fewer financial assets” (5). Race and ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status are significant factors in a conversation about the life conditions of Latina single mothers in the United States.

For a faith community that believes in the value of human dignity, a well of living water must include a serious conversation about and a critical analysis of the intersectionality of these factors so that drinking from this well can also lead “to building the economic security of single women mothers and families” (Chang and Mason 2010, 7). It is not hard to imagine how many times Latina single mothers, just like Hagar (Gen 21:16), may have cried out to God and wept, because they were afraid about the future of their children. However, as the story continues, God “opened her eyes and she saw a well of water” (21:19). What would this well of water look like for Latina single mothers and their children today? Now that we have identified three aspects of the intersectionality of oppressive factors for Latina single mothers in the United States, let us look at the story of Hagar again.

## Hagar: Ethnicity and Gender and Socioeconomic Status

We see the relevance of Hagar's story in Gen 21:9–21 to the situation of Latina single mothers and minority biblical critics by attending to details related to her ethnicity, her gender, and her socioeconomic status. I use Krzysztof Sonek's (2009, 57, and, for a summary of structure outlines, 60–63) outline of the plot to structure my analysis as follows: (1) exposition: verses 1–8; (2) inciting moment: verse 9; (3) complication: verses 10–14; (4) climax: verses 15–16; (5) turning point: verses 17–18; (6) resolution: verse 19; and (7) dénouement: verses 20–21.

### Ethnicity

In Gen 21:9, the inciting moment of the plot (when Sarah notices the two children playing together) is found. As mentioned above, Hagar is named for the first time in this chapter. On the one hand, we have an ancestor of the Israelites, and, on the other, an Egyptian woman. This ethnic difference creates a layer of tension and discrimination. The etymology of Hagar's name has been and continues to be debated among scholars, reflecting past and current differences about how to understand ethnicity. David Adamo and Erivwierho Francis Eghwubare (2005, 456) summarize: "Capoccia says Hagar is an Egyptian name meaning *flight* or *fugitive* or *immigrant* (2000, 5). But both Jones (1990, 136) and Poole (1981, 977) state that the name is from the Hebrew root הָגַר meaning 'flight or fugitive.'... Others derive the name from the Hebrew root גָּוַר meaning 'to tarry,' 'to be a sojourner' (Jones 1990: 136)." They argue that at the basis of the current etymological debate is a subtle denial that Egyptians are or were black people; this detail seems to reflect the Western view of ancient Egypt (Adamo and Eghwubare 2005, 457).

In this same verse (v. 9) another term, מִצַּחֵק, explains the cause of the moment of incitement in the plot. The current debate among scholars regarding its translation is problematic in itself as it assumes that Ishmael (who is never named in Gen 21) had evil intentions toward his brother. Sonek (2009, 46) argues:

The attempt to explain Sarah's anger through recourse to negative ways of understanding the participle מִצַּחֵק is not sufficiently justified. The fundamental procedure applied by historical-critical exegetes should be an analysis of the historical reality to which the text refers. Westermann does

such an analysis, and he proves that Sarah's reaction should be regarded as normal, given the circumstances of ancient patriarchal culture.

Sonek adds that “a comparison between the MT of Gen 21:9 and other ancient versions and translations hardly supports the arguments of those who opt for evil intentions of Ishmael” (46). Interpretations that try to cast a shadow of evil on Ishmael's action in this story, therefore, should be discouraged, as such interpretations add a layer of discrimination that is not in the text.

In Gen 21:10 Sarah intervenes on behalf of her son, Isaac. This is the first of three steps: after Sarah's intervention, God gives a message to Abraham (vv. 12–13), and then Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael away (vv. 14) (Sonek 2009, 57). The complication in the plot occurs at verses 10–14. The author uses the verb *גרש* when Sarah commands Abraham to “send away” Hagar (who is not called by name in this verse but referred to as a “female slave”). James Okoye points out that this verb does double duty in this verse. The verb is the technical term for divorce, indicating that Sarah is telling Abraham to divorce Hagar by sending her away. However, one must note that this same verb “is also used *consistently* for the driving out of the indigenous nations of Canaan” (Okoye 2007, 171, emphasis added). Okoye explains that, while the expression translated “send away” may reflect a matter of divorce/disinheritance, where excluding others is assumed to be the thing to do in this situation (from the perspective of Israel), the fact that this verb also has the latter connotation of “driving out” means exegetes must be aware of the “tremendous ethical responsibility for making sure that the biblical text is not used or interpreted as a toxin that kills individuals or peoples” (175).

Finally, in an intercontextual reading of Hagar's stories in Gen 16 and 21, Kari Latvus (2010) shows that Gen 21 reflects different stages of composition, and dates the final editing of Gen 21:14 in the postexilic period (v. 21 is also part of the complication moment in the plot). Latvus says that “the later (postexilic) writer created a midrash that describes how Hagar was expelled. The last version was a pure historical fiction that exposed the changed attitude toward other ethnic groups” (261–62). Latvus identifies Gen 21 as “a piece of narrative theology, a midrash, explaining the division between those who belong to the family and those who are outsiders” (267). This is another verse that requires caution in its interpretation.

A brief overview of some of the terms (and the debates around them) in this passage brings to light the interpretive dynamics, positive and negative,

surrounding the concept of ethnicity in ancient and contemporary contexts. These elements need to be part of contemporary conversations, because they may continue to influence views and actions today. Certainly, Hagar and Ishmael belonged to a different ethnic group that became the Other in the ancient Israelite and biblical history: Hagar was Egyptian, and her son's status—although he was fathered by a Hebrew person—was determined by Hagar's gender and socioeconomic status.

### Gender and Socioeconomic Status

Beginning with verse 9, and considering again the debate about the etymology of Hagar's name, depending on how her name is translated, the term may give the readers a clue to some additional aspects of her socioeconomic status. She may have been a foreigner (in an ethnic rather than national sense, I assume, since at the time of the patriarchal narratives Israel had not taken possession of the land yet), an immigrant, a fugitive, or a sojourner. Verse 9 also says that "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, *whom she had borne* to Abraham." This detail points to the use of female slaves as surrogate mothers following ancient Near Eastern legal practices (e.g., CH 144; 146; Latvus 2010, 252). Certainly, in contemporary conversations this ancient practice calls for the clarification of the multiple layers of oppression in the life condition of Hagar (a female slave used for reproduction).

In verse 10, during the complication moment of the plot, Hagar is not referenced by name, but the term by which she is referred to hints at her status. She is called a "female slave" (הַאִמָּה) twice. The complication includes words of denigration toward Hagar, and the term "female slave" seems to emphasize that sense in the narrative. Interestingly, in Gen 16, where we find the other story about Hagar, a different term is used for her (שִׁפְחָה, "maidservant"). The form used here, הַאִמָּה (with the article), Pamela Reiss (2000, 107) notes, appears only twice in the Hebrew Bible, here and in the fourth commandment. Mayer Gruber (1995, 441–42) observes that, when Sarah says, "Dismiss this slave woman and *her* son," she is selectively applying "the matrilineal principle enshrined in Exod 21:4." These two connections to the book of Exodus may indicate that this language referring to Hagar in Gen 16 and 21 refers to an ancient Near Eastern cultural practice (as attested in the documents from Nuzi and in CH 175) according to which "children born of liaisons between slaves and free persons inherit the mother's status for better or for worse" (Gruber 1995, 441).

When Hagar is expelled, then, it means that she is “excluded from the family in order *not* to give her son the chance to share the inheritance (21:12)” (Latvus 2010, 267). Theologically, it is significant that in verse 13, also part of the complication moment in the plot, when God addresses Abraham and refers to Hagar, God does not call her by name, but, like Sarah, refers to her as a “female slave.” Ironically, showing a gender imbalance, what is said about Hagar is in sharp contrast to the divine promise that is made to her son, Ishmael (who remains unnamed in the story), in this same verse: “I [God] will make a nation [LXX: ‘great nation’] of him also, because he is your offspring.”

In verse 14, the end of the complication moment in the plot, the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael is completed. Regarding their socioeconomic condition, a dreadful detail is given in the story. Latvus (2010, 267) notices that they do not receive even a small part of the inheritance, and this is “in sharp contrast to other biblical texts. For example, compared with the laws of Deuteronomy, the contrast is clear: Deut 15:12–18 gave an order to release a Hebrew slave and give the slave plenty of gifts.” To give only bread and a skin of water (Gen 21:14) to Hagar (and Ishmael) is inhumane. The story leaves readers with a challenging image to process in future conversations. What did Hagar and Ishmael do to deserve this treatment? What does it say about the socioeconomic structures and practices of the time?

Regarding these same elements in the story, David Schloen brings attention to a Ugaritic myth that, although connected to religion, may reflect ancient cultural practices. This myth shows El (a god) exiling mothers (interestingly, these were maidservants) and sending them away into the wilderness (*KTU* 1.12 and 1.23). “The patriarch El,” Schloen (1993, 209–10) says,

sends two women into the wilderness where their offspring, “El’s children and voracious eaters, roam the fringes of the desert ...” This theme emerged from a *Sitz im Leben* familiar throughout the ancient Levant. It was rooted in the common, yet troubling, practice of expelling the patriarch’s lower-status sons, who were forced to become propertyless wanderers subsisting as agricultural laborers, mercenaries, or bandits at the margins of society.

While it is difficult to establish direct connections between Gen 21 and the Ugaritic myth, some similarities may clarify something about the socioeconomic condition of lower-status people in the ancient Near East.



In verse 19, the moment of resolution in the plot, one aspect of the event connected to the well brings into the conversation a gender aspect in religion. Adamo and Eghwubare point out that the well in the wilderness is revealed to Hagar by divine agency. In Gen 16, the other Hagar story, Hagar names the well next to her “the Well of the Living One who sees me” (v. 14). It has been suggested that this name is of Canaanite origin, “indicating the occupation of the well by a local deity.... Indeed, Blenkinsopp holds that at this sacred spring ‘the High god El was worshipped under yet another designation which in the course of time came to be identified with Yahweh, “the god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”’” (Adamo and Eghwubare 2005, 462–63, citing Blenkinsopp and Challenor 1971, 93). Shockingly, a woman names this religious place.

Finally, in verse 21, the *dénouement* moment of the plot, where “the reader learns about further events of Hagar’s and Ishmael’s life” (Sonek 2009, 58), Hagar is not named, but for the only time in the two stories about her in Gen 16 and 21, she is called “mother,” a powerful term considering that our conversation is about Latina single mothers; however, this detail can be interpreted in various ways. For instance, Latvus (2010, 271) interprets this end as Hagar’s emancipation: “Through her escape and expulsion, she is emancipated due to her personal will and divine help. She overcomes the violence and power over her, which gives her the possibility to be free. In the end, she stays in the border area between Egypt and Palestine, in the margins but no longer marginalized.” On the other hand, Constance Shisanya (2001, 150) explains the final detail of Hagar not returning to Egypt as possibly the result of avoiding her community’s rejection of single mothers: “She [Hagar] is ... likely to face rejection in her community as a single mother like in the Abaluhya community where such a women are buried behind banana plantations (Shisanya 1993:138).”

Besides gender and socioeconomic status, other aspects of Hagar’s social locus may gradually emerge as more readings are done from different contexts and perspectives. The richness of an approach that considers these aspects in a contemporary conversation is that we avoid repeating interpretations or practices that perpetuate the oppression of human beings and focus instead on their empowerment.

### Concluding Comments

In order to be consistent with the theoretical framework (shaping the proposed methodological steps in my analysis) presented in the preliminary



remarks, I must take the next step to which my role as a Latina biblical critic and liberation theologian calls me, which is to share the results of my analysis (about single motherhood and about the text) in conversation with the same group that initially pointed to this issue in the life of the Latina communities. My aim is for conversation to empower people, especially women, in their communities.

In addition, future biblical and theological reflection may fruitfully be pursued in a variety of areas.

1. As I mention above, the next stage in my interpretation is to share the results of this analysis with the community that brought to light this issue; my hope is that together we can seek ways to empower the members of the community in the areas where they are still oppressed. This will bring the perspective of liberation theology full circle.

2. Several scholars are pointing to one significant area that deserves further consideration: namely, the work of scholars and communities from groups that have been minoritized (either by race, ethnicity, or gender). All of these studies emphasize the importance of social location; however, each offers distinctive insights on this aspect and emphasizes the individual (or individual groups) rather than the collective.

To begin with, Nicole M. Sinopoulos (2007) presents three distinct interpretations of the story of Hagar done by three groups: (1) a group of white, middle- to upper-class, Catholic and Protestant women in northern California; (2) a group of Latina Presbyterian immigrants and refugees from Mexico and Central America; and (3) a group of Black South African Protestant women from rural and urban African townships. Each of these groups emphasized a particular portrayal of Hagar. The first group focused on the role of Hagar as a mistress and a divorcee, the second emphasized Hagar's life as an exile, and the last focused on her condition as an exploited worker. Interestingly, Sinopoulos observes that "the women have interpreted the text in such a way that a liberating and redemptive message of hope has emerged for them in the midst of the varying experiences of tragedy and suffering" (71).

In addition, Wilma Ann Bailey also looks at two ethnically diverse groups; however, these groups are not ordinary readers but women scholars. In the first group, Black scholars, she considers herself and Renita Weems. In the other group, Jewish scholars, she includes Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, Savina Teubal, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky. Instead of finding particular similarities between these groups, she found significant differences. Bailey (2002, 44) observes that sharing "social location does not

necessarily lead to a similar interpretation of a text. Social location is only one factor.”

Amanda Benckhuysen adds another factor to the analysis—time. She focuses on three women: Josephine Butler (b. 1828; a white middle-class social activist of Victorian England) and twentieth-century scholars Delores Williams (African American) and Elsa Tamez (Latina American). Benckhuysen (2009, 22) notices that all three, “rather than using the biblical narrative as the lens through which to interpret the world ... used the world as a lens through which to interpret the Bible.” This perspective in the rereading of the story of Hagar allows these interpreters “to expose the differential of power between the various characters portrayed in this story, showing Hagar to be the character with the least amount of power and autonomy” (23).

Needless to say, future studies of the Hagar stories can build on the insights of these three scholars.

3. Many projects of this kind have been conducted with other biblical passages. Significant among these efforts (and marking a new trend in biblical studies) is what is now referred to as empirical hermeneutics. Esa Autero (2011) describes it as “investigating ordinary people’s reading habits and interpretative practices. Methodologically it combines a variety of empirical approaches with biblical studies.” Examples of empirical hermeneutics include the project done by Musa Dube (1996); the work of the Institute for the Study of the Bible in South Africa (1996; cited in West and Dube 2000, 782); and, most recently, the project called “Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible,” led by Hans de Wit (2014). The Through the Eyes of Another project is commendable, especially as it shifts the starting point of analysis toward actual communities of readers, and future publications of this enterprise should be welcomed. However, this project seems to be oriented toward the construction of intercultural dialogues and also to clarifying characteristic aspects of the diverse voices in the conversation, bringing in this way validity to their individual claims. These dialogues are the start of a necessary enterprise, and biblical scholarship will benefit tremendously from it.

Yet I believe that the aims (vision and mission) that emerged from the epistemological breakthrough made by liberation theology go beyond the empirical hermeneutics projects. The central aim of liberation theology is to empower the communities for the betterment of humanity. As a Latina biblical critic and intellectual, through the perspective of liberation theology I am still able to see a vision of the *well* that allows me to take a

*well*-informed and a *well*-engaged stance in the inquiry process from the exterior borders, and this accompanies me in the journey from wilderness to life (Calderón Pilarski 2014, 247).

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## Dis/inheriting: Bastardizing Traditions (Genesis 21:1–21)

Henry W. Morisada Rietz

“But Who Am I, and Who Are My People?” (1 Chr 29:14)

I am a bastard.<sup>1</sup> My father is of Japanese ancestry. He is Nisei, second generation. Both of his parents and grandparents were born and raised in Japan and emigrated to the Territory of Hawai‘i. Because my mother was of European descent, for most of my life I was excluded from the category I call Japanese (Americans). My practice of placing “American” in parentheses attempts to capture the ways that people in Hawai‘i typically refer to themselves and each other by their ancestry—Japanese, Okinawan, Chinese, Filipino, Portuguese—without appending or hyphenating “American” along with the historic impact of the segregated plantations and the continued demographic dominance of Asian Americans (for discussion of terminology, see Okamura 1994; 2008).

Growing up in Hawai‘i, I am considered *hapa*, a term that simultaneously brought for me assimilation to and distance from others. While the term has received some recognition on the mainland United States, especially among Asian American circles, some have critiqued the appropriation of an indigenous Hawai‘ian word as yet another example of the dominant culture stealing cultural capital from a minoritized community. *Hapa*, and more specifically *hapa-haole* (meaning “half-foreigner,” it usually refers to those who are “half-white”), was the term imposed on me by the late twentieth-century dominant (not indigenous) culture of Hawai‘i. I have struggled to come to terms with that label in my life (Rietz 2002; 2006).

I was trained in biblical studies, whose majority academy regulates and promotes disciplinary practice, privileging certain practices over

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1. For a discussion of *bastard* as a derogatory biblical epithet, see Bailey 1995, 121–38.

others. Academies develop discourses of competition and critiques of undisciplined (read “impure”) methods (see Liew 2008). Strictly disciplinary practice seeks a singular inherent meaning within its methods and leads to silos of interpretations. The minoritized, however, recognize and promote biblical studies as a field, encompassing a variety of methods and disciplines, whose practice and integration are beneficial for a variety of goals (Bailey, Liew, and Segovia 2009).

Genesis 21:1–21 is part of a series of hybridized texts (see Brett 2002, esp. 119). Classical source critics see in this passage first the joining of J and E into the Old Epic and then the redaction of the Priestly Source (see Campbell and O’Brien 1993). While the identification of sources, contexts, and perspectives is debated, it is clear that the Pentateuch as a whole is a hybridized text, multiple traditions from different times.

Narratological approaches privilege the final form of Genesis. Part of the narrative of Genesis tells the family stories of the putative ancestors of the Israelite people and mythologically forms identity. As Eddie S. Glaude Jr. (2003, 29) writes:

Myths can also be understood as true stories.... Myths authorize and legitimate ways of being in the world. Myths acquire this status precisely because they are believed to express the truth, and insofar as they are deemed credible, myths authorize beliefs, practices, choices, and actions that animate a particular community of experience. So, whether we view myths as fictions or as true stories, there is the recognition that this particular way of seeing the world has real effects on how we understand ourselves, interact with our fellows, and interpret our world. Obviously, true or not, myths matter.

The ancestral narratives of Genesis begin in chapter 12, when God instructs Abram and Sarai to depart from their homeland and promises them a new land and descendants who will become a great nation. Drama and suspense are supplied by the various threats to the fulfillment of these promises—most relevant for our passage, Abram and Sarai’s inability to have children.

The lack of heir raises the question of how Abram will become the father of a great nation and provides drama for the narrative. According to the narrative, Abram is advancing in age. In Gen 17:1 he is said to be ninety-nine years old. His wife, Sarai, is not far behind him at ninety years old (Gen 17:17). Still, Sarai is portrayed as a sexually desirable woman: both a pharaoh (Gen 12) and King Abimelech (Gen 20) want to be with



her, causing even more drama. Sarai and Abram try to resolve the problem of lack of an heir by having Abram impregnate Sarai's Egyptian "slave-girl" Hagar, who gives birth to a son, Ishmael. Given by Sarai to Abram "as wife" (16:3), Abram returns her to Sarai as her "slave girl" to "do to her as [she] please" (16:6). Representing her horrific lack of agency in these transactions, I, along with the dialogue between Abram and Sarai, reduce her to pronouns. Throughout chapter 17 the mother of Ishmael is unreferenced, either by name or pronoun. As Phyllis Trible (1984, 9–36) suggests, the story of Hagar is one of the Bible's many "texts of terror."

Despite Abram and Sarai's attempt to fulfill the promises through the forced surrogacy of Hagar, the "God of the Mounds" (אל שדי) announces that Abram, the "exalted father," will become the "father of a multitude," Abraham. God renames Sarai Sarah, both variations of "princess," and promises to "give" Abraham "a son by her" (17:15–16). It is through this line that God establishes an "eternal covenant" with Abraham and "his seed," signified by circumcision (17:9–14). Despite Abraham's intercession for Ishmael (17:8), God specifically excludes him from the covenant, choosing emphatically the son Sarah shall bear to Abraham, who will be named Isaac (17:9). As a concession to Abraham, God blesses Ishmael (17:20) but again emphatically excludes him from the covenantal line (17:21). Despite Ishmael's exclusion, Abraham circumcises him (17:23–27), an act the narrator validates "as [being in accordance with what] God said to him" (17:23b). The passage 21:1–21 provides a climax to these stories.

### Separation and Survival

While many commentators have emphasized the passage's climatic fulfillment of God's promise of a son to Sarah and Abraham, I am drawn to the plight of Hagar and Ishmael. Perhaps we should be confident in God's promise to make of Ishmael "a great nation" (21:13), but I am horrified at Abraham's treatment of them. Although the narrator reports the thought of sending them away "distressed Abraham greatly," Abraham, known in other passages for his hospitality, merely gives her "bread and a skin of water" and "sends her on her way." The narrator specifies Abraham's distress was "on account of his son" (v. 11). While God's speech includes Hagar, God tells Abraham that he should "not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman" (v. 12). Both Abraham's and God's actions contradict benevolent intentions.

Hagar wanders in the wilderness, and when she runs out of water, Hagar leaves the boy under the shade of some bushes and goes off a ways to avoid seeing his seemingly inevitable death. Although the narrator identifies Hagar as the one “lift[ing] up her voice and weep[ing]” (v. 16), it is the boy’s voice that God hears and responds to. “The angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, ‘What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him’” (vv. 17–18). So “God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink” (v. 19).

Although many passages in the Bible portray God as one who liberates the oppressed, sometimes one does not have the privilege of hoping for liberation. Womanist theologian Delores Williams (1993, 33) sees in the story of Hagar not liberation but what she calls a “survival struggle”:

The African-American community has taken Hagar’s story unto itself. Hagar has “spoken” to generation after generation of black women because her story has been validated as true by suffering black people. She and Ishmael together, as family, model many black American families in which a lone woman/mother struggles to hold the family together in spite of the poverty to which ruling class economics consign it. Hagar, like many black women, goes into the wide world to make a living for herself and her child, with only God by her side.

Williams sees the truth of the Bible not in accurately portraying some historical event or prescribing some rule or moral lesson, but in portraying—as good art often does—real human experience, which can inform, strengthen, console, feel, or sometimes just express and help us survive our own experiences. Williams (2006, 177) writes:

It is obvious to me that God’s response to Hagar in Genesis was not liberation. Rather, God participated in Hagar and her child’s survival on many occasions.... When Hagar and her child were finally cast out ... and were not given proper resources for survival, God provided Hagar with a resource. She received vision to see survival resources where she had seen none before.... Many black women have testified that “God helped them make a way out of no way.”

Mark G. Brett situates the final form of the narrative within the context of the early Persian period. He argues that “the final editors of Genesis have set out to undermine the theologically legitimized ethnocentrism found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, expressed in particular by the notion of the ‘holy seed’ (Ezra 9.1–2)” (Brett 2000, 5). Brett argues that in the Persian period circumcision was not a distinctive marker of identity, since Jeremiah attests to the Egyptians, the Edomites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, and “all the desert dwellers” as “circumcised in the foreskin” (מול-בערלה) although “uncircumcised in the heart” (ערלי-לב; Jer 9:25–26). Citing Gen 21:20–21, Brett (2000, 64–65) goes on to suggest that the Ishmaelites may be included among the “desert dwellers.” While Ezra 9:2 explicitly forbids intermarriage with Egyptians, Ammonites, and Moabites, Brett states, “The logic of the exclusivism in Ezra 9.2 cannot be based on the sign of the covenant in Genesis 17. It may be no accident, therefore, that immediately following Genesis 17 we find two inter-related chapters which conclude by explaining the origins of two of the other circumcised peoples: the Ammonites and Moabites” (65). With the story of Abraham circumcising Ishmael in Gen 17:23–27, Brett concludes, “Chapters 18–19, one could say, provide the Abrahamic link to these other peoples similarly distinguished by the practice of circumcision” (65; cf. 72). In Brett’s reading, God emphasizes to Abraham that God “will make a nation of him also, because he is your seed” (Gen 21:13) (73).

Biblical Japanese (American) Family Values:  
“A Wandering Aramean Was My Ancestor”

*These are the generations of Morisada. Kameichiro begot Kazuo, Kichio, Masao, Yoshio, Heiichi, Hiroshi, and Tadashi. Heiichi begot Toshio, the chonan, and Toshio begot Henry.*

I see in the ancestral narratives of Genesis similar but distinct reflections of my own story and the stories of my ancestors (cf. Yamada 2009). My ancestral stories are stories of separations and survival, drama to find and to be a suitable heir. My father’s parents and grandparents were born and raised in the Hiroshima Prefecture of Japan. The patriarchal and patrilineal family structure of Japan in the nineteenth century privileged the eldest son—*chonan*—who typically inherited the majority of the family property and who was responsible for carrying on the family name honorably. Since my father’s grandfathers were not the firstborn sons in their families,

they did not have property or financial resources to inherit. So, like many other Japanese in the late 1800s and early 1900s, they left their families in Japan and immigrated to Hawai'i to work on and around the sugar plantations. Yosaburo Yoshida's 1909 study identifies poverty and the challenge of dividing small farms among progeny as one of the major economic factors in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan inducing emigration (Ogawa 1980, 20–26). The average amount of farmland per capita in my grandparents' and great-grandparents' prefecture, Hiroshima, was the lowest in all Japan.

When my grandfather died in 1948, following Japanese (American) tradition, my father, as the eldest son (*chonan*), became the head of the household, responsible for his teenage brother and sister, and representing the family at funerals and other gatherings (see Johnson 1972, 197–277, esp. 263).

*These are the generations of Yabuki. Riichiro married Sada and begot three daughters, Aiko, Tsuruko, and Toshie. Aiko married Heiichi and she gave birth to Toshio. Toshio begot Henry.*

Japanese (American) family values demanded that the family name be continued honorably. Central to this continuation was marriage and the production of suitable progeny. Jitsuichi Masuoka's 1938 study of the Japanese (American) family values in Hawai'i provides a window into the understanding of marriage and the intersection of honor and class:

Where the continuation of the family is of supreme importance, marriage is of vital concern because it ensures the perpetuation of the family. Since it always means a relationship between two families ... the head of the family is very particular in the choice of his or her son's wife. A good marriage usually means a union with a family of the same standing in the community. Therefore, love before marriage is strongly disapproved, for it usually jeopardizes the social status of the family. "Love makes no distinction between high and low" (*Koi ni Joge no, Hedate nashi*) says the Japanese proverb. (Ogawa 1980, 95–96)

Concerns about status and honor were the determining values: "The Japanese notion of 'family honor' was deeply imbedded in the relationships of the Island home.... The family must not be shamed. The individual must do nothing which reflects negatively on the image which the family projects

to neighbors and friends” (Ogawa 1980, 85). The honorable continuation of a family name is a major responsibility of especially the eldest son, the *chonan*. Masuoka reports that in the 1930s the majority of Japanese (American) homes continued to privilege the oldest son. He quotes an informant who describes the hierarchy within Japanese (American) families:

Younger children, too, are made to obey their elders. They have to call their elder brothers and sisters by certain titles, *niisan* (older brother) and *nesan* (older sister) and not by their own names.... In spite of the large size of my family, I, being the eldest, can demand more things and have more privileges than the rest of my brothers.... It seems to be the accepted axiom that the first born child, or *chonan*—to be exact, the first born male child—should be ranked above the rest of the children of the family. (Ogawa 1980, 97)

However, the privileged position of the eldest son was not completely secure. Masuoka explains:

If the heir fails to live up to the expectation of the family or appears to be incapable of managing the family property, or *disgraces the family name* by committing a crime or *marrying against the wishes of the patriarch and the family*, he is likely to be disowned and have his name taken off the family register ... or to be compelled to give up the right of succession to the headship.... *If, for example, some member of the family insists on marrying a woman of lower social standing* or has disgraced his family name in the eyes of the community, he is sometimes disinherited and thus becomes an individual having no connection whatsoever with his original family. (Ogawa 1980, 98, emphasis added)

Since there were concerns about marrying the *right kind* of Japanese, marrying a non-Japanese (American) was deemed shameful, at least among some Japanese (Americans). Ogawa (1980, 79) captures the sentiment:

True to his family wishes, obligated to his ancestral heritage, the Issei man could marry only a Japanese woman. Interethnic marriage, though not unheard of, was inimical to the Japanese pride of race and ethnic integrity. The family honor, even if removed by an ocean, demanded a proper Japanese wife to raise well-trained Japanese children who would be reared in a well-maintained Japanese home.

These Japanese (American) family values continued on for several generations in my father's family.

Failure to produce a male progeny to continue the family name was a source of drama and suspense for some Japanese and Japanese (American) families. In the absence of a suitable male progeny, families could search for a man willing to be adopted into the family and continue the family name; such a man was called a *yoshi*. If a family had daughters, but no sons, there was pressure especially on the oldest daughter to secure a suitable husband willing to take her last name and become a *muko-yoshi*.<sup>2</sup> While often a means to social mobility, the status of being a *yoshi* was tenuous and not especially desirable. As Masuoka comments, "The unpopularity of this practice is voiced in the proverbial saying: 'If there is a mere handful of rice in the house one should never be adopted'" (Ogawa 1980, 99).

### Bastardizing Biblical Japanese (American) Family Values

Behold, an unmarried woman will conceive, and bear a son ...

I am certain that my conception in 1966 was a mistake, a big mistake. I have no delusions about being immaculate. My mother was born outside the city of Dresden, Germany. She survived the Nazis and escaped from East Germany just before the Berlin Wall was erected, eventually immigrating to the United States and settling in Hawai'i. Although my father was willing to violate his strong Japanese (American) family values, which did not condone marrying my mother, risking shame on his family, my parents did not marry. For most of my life, my father's extended family did not know about my birth. My father's family did not know anything about me; they did not even know that I existed until my daughter was born in 1995.

The Japan that is nostalgically recalled and reified by the Issei and Nissei is also an unstable cultural relic. As Sylvia Junko Yanagisako (1985, 17) observes, "The Japan in which the Issei grew up at the end of the nineteenth century was as dynamic as the United States in which their children, the Nisei, grew up in the twentieth century." Yanagisako discusses how the Meiji government promulgated samurai (*bushi*) marriage and family prac-

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2. For discussion of adoption of an heir including a son-in-law in Hawai'i, see Masuoka's account (Ogawa 1980, 93–104). For discussion of this practice among Issei and Sansei in Seattle, see Yanagisako 1985, 35–36, 138–42, 148, 164–65. For discussion of codification in the Meiji Civil Code, see Beillevaire 1996, 246.

tices, such as arranged marriages and primogenitural succession, to the peasantry. As strategies to modernize Japan and to protect itself against colonization, the Meiji government also integrated Western European ideas about the family, codifying both in the civil code in the 1890s (17–18). The rights and responsibilities of the head of household include:

The right of consent to the marriage and divorce, the adoption, of each member of the family, right of determining his or her place of residence, and the right of expelling such person from the family, or of forbidding his or her return to it. He has also the right of succession to property in default of other heirs. But the headship of a family carries with it also duties and responsibilities, the duty of supporting indigent members of the family, the duty under certain circumstances of guardianship, and responsibility for the debts of all. (Ogawa 1980, 94)

Family hierarchy was a microcosm of the larger imperial social order, with the patriarchal father mirroring the relationship between emperor and subject (Beillevaire 1996, 242–67). Yanagisako (1985, 17–18) observes:

The “rules of the Japanese family”—including the authority of the household head—taught to the Issei as part of their “moral training” in the state-controlled educational system were a blend of Western European and elite Japanese ideologies of family and polity. If today [1985], therefore, those rules are viewed by Japanese Americans as quintessentially Japanese, this can only demonstrate how quickly a seemingly timeless tradition can be created.

Historicizing Japanese family practices in Meiji Japan demonstrate how the notion of Japanese (American) traditions is unstable and fictive (for discussion of Japan in the twentieth century, see Dower 1999; Field 1993).

The malleability of Japanese (American) identity is evident in Christine R. Yano’s (2002; 2006) study of the Cherry Blossom Festival Queen Pageant. This beauty pageant is an interesting site to see the ways that race and ethnicity are inscribed and traditions practiced in Hawai‘i.<sup>3</sup> Yano

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3. See also Okamura (2002), who includes the 1996 case of the O‘ahu Americans of Japanese Ancestry Senior Baseball League’s decision not to admit Bill Blanchette to play in their league, and the *Rice v. Cayetano* decision of the US Supreme Court on whether descent-based eligibility concerning *Na Kanaka Maoli* (the indigenous people of Hawai‘i) is constitutional.

(2002, 95) discerns the ways “beauty contests crystalize social processes and ideologies of identity through the lens of gender and collectivity.” The Cherry Blossom Festival is an instrument of the Honolulu Japanese Junior Chamber of Commerce, which opened its membership to persons of other ethnicities in the late 1950s. However, it was not until the 1999 pageant, in a controversial decision, that participants who were not 100 percent Japanese (American) ancestry were allowed to participate.

While in the 1950s the pageant “was a performance of *American-ness* first, and *Japanese-ness* second,” in the 1980s and 1990s the “contestants’ preparatory classes ... [began to include] cultural classes in tea ceremony, flower arranging, Japanese business etiquette, and more recently *taiko* drumming and even *manju* (Japanese confection) making” (Yano 2002, 105, 111; 2006, 123–82). Nevertheless, the 50 percent blood quantum requirement still remains. The requirements for contestants specify that women be “between 19 and 26 years old and at least 50 percent Japanese.” More interestingly, despite the shift to emphasizing Japanese cultural practices, Yano (2002, 114) points out:

The manju manju contestants learn to make is not what is found in Japan but is “jack-o-lantern” manju—an orange bun in which has been cut eyes, nose, and mouth of a smiling jack-o-lantern colored brown from the azuki bean filling. The taiko that the contestants learn comes through the filter of drumming as an evolving syncretic symbol of Japanese American cultural practice by way of California and Japan. Even in Japan, taiko ensembles are a newly and evolved and invented twentieth century tradition.

As Yano (2002, 98) demonstrates, using the history of this pageant, “Japanese American identity is not a static concept; rather, it shifts with the times” (see Dower 1999 for discussion of post–World War II Japan; Field 1993 regarding the end of the twentieth century).

*“Perhaps in no other place do the conflicts and accommodations of culture become more evident than in the Japanese home.”*

—Misako Yamamoto, in Ogawa 1980, 201

When my mother passed away in 2013, we relocated my father, who has Alzheimer’s, to live with us in Grinnell, Iowa. He was eighty-six years old. Although his short-term memory is poor, he can remember the “good old



days,” growing up on a sugar plantation in Hawai‘i, where his mother was a Japanese schoolteacher and his father manufactured and sold soap. Their water was supplied by an irrigation ditch, so his parents would wrap a Bull Durham bag around the faucet to act as a strainer. “Buttafinger [Butterfinger] and Babe Ruth were one penny.” (Along with many in Hawai‘i, my father speaks both “standard” English and Hawai‘ian Pidgin English, which the United States Census recently recognized as a distinct language.) “Movies were 5 cents.” Laborers “earned a dolla [dollar] a day.” His parents had an icebox, and the ice man delivered a block of ice, which they wrapped in newspaper to slow down the melting process. If they forgot to empty the drip pan underneath the icebox, they would have a puddle in the kitchen. For my dad those were, indeed, the good old days.

The first time we set the table for dinner at our house in Iowa, my father silently took his place at the right hand of the head of the table. While I personally eschew patriarchy and have always avoided the symbolism of hierarchy in the family, I knew that for me to take my seat at the head of the table would provide my father with a sense of comfort and order. The visual structure of the Japanese (American) family provides him security that he will be taken care of and that he is at home in the midst of his dislocation.

For my father, the world of the plantation was orderly, organized by ethnic groups. My father often reminisces that in the plantation there “was the Japanese camp, the Portuguese camp, Haole [White] camp, few Koreans, but a Korean Camp,” to which I silently respond, “But where do I fit? I don’t belong in that world.” He has been recently reciting a prayer before meals that was traditional in his childhood home—a prayer I never heard growing up—emphasizing proper etiquette. Taking up his *hashi* (chopsticks) or other utensil, he recites:

Hashi toraba, Amatsuchi Miyo no On-megumi, Fubo ya Shishō no On  
wo Ajiwae.  
Itadakimasu!

When we take up my chopsticks, we savor (or “must not forget”) our debt of gratitude to the imperial reign of Heaven and Earth (i.e., the Showa emperor), our parents, and our teachers. Itadakimasu!<sup>4</sup>

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4. I am grateful to Katherine Rankin Matsuura (private communication) for providing the text, translation, and context for this prayer.

As Katherine Rankin Matsuura pointed out to me, variations of this prayer originated in the early Showa period (late 1920s or early 1930s) and were especially popular during Japan's Pacific War (1931–1945). These prayers were ultimately banned by the occupation forces of the United States (my father was a part of the occupation forces, serving as a translator for the Military Intelligence Service).

Ritual and art serve as a space to capture the knowledge gaps between the generations. Carrie Y. Takahata (2002) poetically captures the frustration of a Yonsei (fourth generation) being expected to know traditions while being raised to assimilate.

Mom,  
What are you saying?  
What'd you mean,  
How come I don't know? And *What kind*  
*Japanese are you?* Don't act  
Like I'm supposed to know these words. You  
Never told them to me before.

I struggle with the reification of patriarchy and even imperialism that have been the source of so much suffering—globally and familially, of which even my father was a victim—yet to impose my own values and sensibilities from my position of power would be an act of violence in my father's present condition, rather than compassion and love.

### Shoyu on Rice

Some of the most valuable resources for strategies of negotiation may be found in Asian American and especially Japanese (American) literature.<sup>5</sup> Emerging playwright Scot Izuka dramatically represents some of the negotiations of cultures and traditions in Hawai'i in his play *Shoyu on Rice*.<sup>6</sup> Set in Honolulu in the 1980s, the play centers on the arrival of a *haole* substitute teacher, Miss Cathy Decker, from Kansas. Part of the

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5. For literature from and about Hawai'i, see the publications of Bamboo Ridge Press. I have also found particularly helpful Asian American memoirs and creative nonfiction. See Chai 2007; Mura 1991; 1996; Minatoya 1993.

6. The play debuted at Kuhu Kahua Theatre, the first theater dedicated to promoting local works about life in Hawai'i, in August–September 2014 with an extended season in October. The show was reprised at Kuhu Kahua Theatre in summer 2015.

story focuses on her imposition of “standard” English on pidgin English-speaking students at an all-boys Catholic high school. Another part of the play portrays her relationship with her fiancé’s parents, the Yamamotos. Despite Cathy’s love for their son (who never appears in the play) and her best efforts to please the Yamamotos, her future mother-in-law refuses to accept her:

Mom: Huh! Love don’t mean nuttin. (turns to DAD) Adjusting to married life is hard, especially when you ... you know ... (Again DAD gives MOM a skeptical look) ... have *cultural* differences. (beat) When you married, you see each other all da time. Da smallest t’ing can grow to be one big problem. (beat) I betchu she wears her shoes in da house ... and ... and ... she go sleep without taking a bath ... and ... and she put shoyu on her rice!

Dad: So what? Lots of people put shoyu on rice.

Mom: Not Japanese people.<sup>7</sup>

Izuka’s dialogue between the Yamamotos candidly captures the kinds of prejudices held against *haoles*, especially “mainland *haoles*,” while also sympathetically portraying Mrs. Yamamoto’s motivations. She does not slavishly hold to traditions; rather, her genuine love for her son and desire for his happiness are foregrounded. Izuka, however, is not content to leave the situation unresolved. In the climatic closing scene, with insider information provided by Mr. Yamamoto, Cathy gets Mrs. Yamamoto to recall her courtship with husband, despite the objections of her own mother. Mrs. Yamamoto reveals she committed one of the same acts that earlier she had used to mark Cathy as breaking Japanese tradition and as an incompatible match for her son. Thus, Izuka provides a theatrical representation of a way to constructively negotiate tradition. Rather than reifying the past and tradition as basis for exclusion, Mrs. Yamamoto’s recollection of her own experience of cultural and familial conflict provides her with the opening for an empathic acceptance of Cathy.

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For examples of the popular reception of the play, see the reviews by Adams 2014 and Baker 2014.

7. I am indebted to Scot Izuka for sharing with me excerpts from the script (written communication).

Unstable Condition, a Symptom of Life<sup>8</sup>

This discussion of the “Japan” in Japanese (American) family values and identities reveals it to be unstable and fictive. While “Japan” and “Japanese” are invoked as a standard, a sort of measuring rod or canon to determine legitimacy and authenticity, those standards have been manufactured, hybridized in Meiji Japan to impose imperial reign, as well as transmitted and transformed by Issei and Nisei in Hawai‘i to assist and resist assimilation, avoid shame, and preserve a fictive purity.

Is the story of Hagar and Ishmael a text of terror or an inspiration for survival? Does the Genesis account reinforce a patriarchal system and legitimize ethnocentrism, or is it a subversive text that contests the dominant social structures? Different readings are possible. Different readings are meaningful. Different interpretations are useful. The hybridity of readings reveals the dis/inherent meanings of the text. The reader chooses texts and contexts to privilege and suppress. Our interpretive moves are versions, from the Latin verb *vertere*, “to turn.” We can revert, invert, subvert, divert, controvert, pervert texts and traditions, meanings and identity (Liew 2008, 2–9). We may be bastards.

My intention in making overt the fictive foundations of biblical texts and Japanese (American) identities is not to legitimize textual abuse or cultural exploitation but to destabilize arguments about legitimacy and authenticity and foreground our agency and responsibility as we read texts and construct identities, identities that include some but exclude others. We can be bastards, but bastards who accept responsibility critically, but empathetically.

This is the length of Abraham’s life, one hundred seventy-five years. Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre, the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. (Gen 25:7–10a)

The filial duty of a son is a continuous obligation as long as the family is in existence. It is handed down from one generation to another. “Fathers may not be fathers but sons must always be sons,” and they

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8. “Unstable condition, a symptom of life” comes from Rush’s 1980 song “Vital Signs.”

must learn to be more pious than their fathers were to their forefathers.  
(Masuoka, in Ogawa 1980, 83)

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## Freedom in the Wilderness between Two Worlds: A Native American Approach to Genesis 21:1–21

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As with any hermeneutic from the perspective of a minoritized group, offering *the* Native American reading of any text is not simply problematic; it is impossible. The danger with approaching the Bible from a Native American perspective is that we risk blanketing all Native experiences into one, as if “Native Americans” were a monolithic group, lacking internal diversity and complexity. Given the breadth of Native perspectives and experiences in America—within and apart from reservation lands, varying socioeconomic backgrounds, differing educational levels, vastly different tribal traditions, and so on—it is inappropriate to speak of Natives as an amalgam that can be easily defined. Still, to read the Bible with Native American eyes—*any* Native American eyes—is to see the text with a distinctive hermeneutical approach.

### Native Americans: Realities and Hermeneutics

There is first the question of whether Native Americans can be considered a minority in America. The notion of Natives as minoritized has been the subject of some debate given the distinction between minority and indigenous communities (Bailey, Liew, and Segovia 2009, 4 n. 2). Native peoples in America are undoubtedly a minority in terms of number, and they experience social status and staggering statistics that mirror those of other minorities in this country in significant ways. Native Americans are often plagued with less access to education, higher unemployment, economic poverty, housing issues, alcoholism, and significant health disparities alongside other minority communities, not to mention cultural appropriation and racism. Native Americans also have the highest rate of diabetes in

the United States of America, likely due to a shift from traditional crops to store-bought and commodity-based foods (see Lassiter 1998, 164). Typically involved in the manual-labor workforce, they are often the first to be laid off, along with other minorities who lack sufficient education and job skills (Fixico 2006, 35). American media dehumanizes Native identity by caricaturing the Indian—especially the sensual female Indian—or worse, using him as a football mascot (Bird 2001; Roppolo 2010). Blatant and more veiled forms of racism abound, but to treat them all would constitute a significant volume, and such is not my focus here.

What distinguishes Native Americans from other minorities is the pursuance of political sovereignty alongside civil rights and equality, yet this unique characteristic does not make Natives any less a part of our focus on minority criticism. If anything, this uniqueness makes Native participation in the conversation even more valuable. As Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia (2009, 6) rightly affirm, the term “‘minority’ is really less about number and more about power.” Native struggles for power and self-determination amid modern American culture require that we move the Native American voice to the forefront of our studies of what it means to read the Bible as Other.

If a unified indigenous American perspective does emerge, however, it may not necessarily embrace the Bible. Any exegete engaging in biblical hermeneutics from a Native perspective must prepare oneself for this outcome. In his seminal work “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,” first published as “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today” (1989), Robert Allen Warrior (1989, 261) contends that, while a “Native American theology of liberation” has a nice ring to it, such a seemingly perfect marriage is not only difficult but perhaps even dangerous. Warrior presents an uncomfortable and compelling argument that the exodus story—typically the starting point for most biblical liberation theologies—is an inappropriate place for Native Americans to begin talking about liberation. Warrior (1991, 237) argues that, because the Israelite exodus is intrinsically connected to the demise of the Canaanites, God the Deliverer is at the same time God the Conqueror. The most appropriate representation of Native Americans in the biblical narrative is, therefore, that of the Canaanites, eradicated from their lands so that Israelites might have religious prosperity in a land that was not their own.

Despite the theological difficulties that may hinder Native American interpretations of the Bible, such approaches are crucial to our her-

meneutical conversation, particularly given how the Bible has been used against the Native community. Although the exodus narrative is commonly utilized in liberation approaches, it is certainly not the first text appropriate for indigenous hermeneutics; to be sure, the entire Bible is ripe for such studies. There is no methodological structure or rubric from which one can “do” Native American hermeneutics—and where would be the fun in that? But I keep my focus simple: Where is my voice in the text, the indigenous voice? What are the implications for me and the Native community? I certainly cannot speak for all Native Americans, and it is also important that I disclose my own social location. I am a product of both Indian and European descent, as is fairly common throughout much of Native America, thanks to forced assimilation, and is especially prominent in the region of western Arkansas and eastern Oklahoma of my origins. As such, I am particularly interested in the intersection of minoritized and dominant identities, which I find particularly powerful in the depiction of the Israelites as both oppressed and oppressors.

### Genesis 21:1–21 as Problematic Story

A particularly problematic story is that of Hagar and Ishmael and their rejection from Abraham’s lineage and his covenant with Yahweh, found in Gen 21:1–21. The majority of readers are unfamiliar with the traditional redactional sources of the story distinctions, and thus I am inclined to read the narrative as a whole, taking into account the final form of the text. Warrior (1991) agrees that this approach is most appropriate for Native American biblical studies in “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians.” The story conjures images of “indigenes” at the hand of dominant culture. As the firstborn son of Abraham, Ishmael *should* be the rightful heir to his father’s promise. Instead, he is cast into the wilderness to die, only to be saved and yet disinherited from his birthright. A Native American reading of the Ishmael story—drawing from both Gen 16 and 21—exposes a God relatively blithe toward Ishmael and a patriarch much more concerned with his own prosperity than that of his firstborn son and the woman who bore him. However, there is more to the story, and a generous reading points to the freedom offered Ishmael in the wilderness.

To understand the impact and implications of Gen 21:1–21, we must first look at Hagar’s and Ishmael’s introductions in Gen 16. Hagar is an Egyptian “maid” or “slave girl” (שפחה) living with her Hebrew masters in

Hebron. Although Yahweh has promised Abram that he will be the father of a great nation (12:2), he has no children, and thus no heir to his lineage (16:1). When Sarai grows nervous about being childless, she sees an opportunity that she might be “built up” (אֲבֹנָה) through Hagar—that is, that she might have a child through her (v. 2). Sarah gives Hagar to Abraham, and he takes her as an אִשָּׁה, a “wife,” indicating a shift in her current status (v. 3). Notably, however, Abram is never designated as her husband in the text (Reis 2000, 82). While one might presume that Hagar’s promotion in Abram’s family affords her certain rights, Hagar has no say in the matter but must do as her mistress commands.

Once Abram has taken her for his own, Hagar becomes pregnant and consequently looks at her mistress with contempt (v. 4). There exists no scholarly consensus as to why Hagar views Sarah in lower esteem, but this seems an expected reaction given her mistreatment. It is not Hagar’s duty as a lowly slave girl to enjoy her sexual exploitation and rejoice at the idea of her surrogacy for a child who will not even be regarded as her own. Given the dangers of childbearing in the ancient world, it is also safe to assume that Hagar’s life is on the line, all for a child who will belong to her mistress (Exum 1985, 76). Hagar looks at her mistress with contempt not because she feels somehow better than Sarai because she has conceived, but rather because Hagar understands that she serves a strictly utilitarian function. Not only does she have no say in her own sexual activity, but moreover her body is being used only for the purpose of promoting her mistress. In short, Hagar the innocent is used and abused (Trible 1985, 232, *pace* Robinson 2013, 215). As a slave, she does not have to embrace this treatment; she simply must submit to it.

Unsurprisingly, Sarai’s bright idea is met with personal regret and subsequent conflict. Sarai afflicts (עָנָה) the girl, and Hagar flees an abusive situation only to be rescued in the wilderness by a God who tells her to return to this mistreatment. Yahweh does promise to make Hagar flourish, notably using similar language to his blessing to Abraham in Gen 12, yet God sends her back to submit to her malicious mistress. Here one can argue that assimilation is not only necessary for survival; it is divinely ordained. While scholars, pointing to the fourteen-year span between Ishmael’s birth and the scene in Gen 21, have pointed out, among other issues, the unlikelihood that Hagar throws a teenager over her shoulder upon her dismissal (21:14), Hermann Gunkel (1997) notes that the encounter with the angel in 16:9 functions as a literary connector between the two Ishmael stories in Gen 16 and 21. Gunkel’s observation certainly helps make sense

of the age and time discrepancies between the two stories, but it does not explain or redeem the fact that God's blessings to Hagar and her unborn child are followed by a return to slavery. Canonically and narratively the texts flow together, thus necessitating treatment as a somewhat cohesive unit, at least literarily.

Fast-forward a few years, and we find Hagar in a similar situation. Sarai—now Sarah—has finally borne her own son, thus creating an interesting and uncomfortable family system. Sarah's insight into the unsustainability of this dynamic comes when she sees Ishmael playing, either with Isaac or alone. The LXX adds the phrase "with her son Isaac," but the MT remains ambiguous as to whether Ishmael is playing alone or with Isaac (see Zucker 2012, 2). What Ishmael is actually doing is not clear, and scholars propose a range of activities from "horsing around" to even masturbating (Trible 1985, 244) or fondling Isaac (see Hamilton 1995, 78–79). Gerhard von Rad (1972, 232) is correct that Ishmael's actions need not be evil or malicious at all to evoke a negative reaction in Sarah. In fact, the answer lies in a Hebrew pun: Ishmael is "playing" (מצחק, root צחק), notably the participle form of Isaac's name (צחק, root צחק). She sees him "Isaacing" or "playing Isaac" and realizes the implications for Isaac (Okoye 2007, 171, citing Coats 1981, 37). Sarah is not jealous of Ishmael but rather sees him as a threat to her own son's prosperity (see, among others, von Rad 1972, 232; Gunkel 1997, 226).

According to both biblical sources and ancient Near Eastern law, the son of a slave had legal claim to inherit his father's estate, and Sarah finally realizes the threat (see CH 170–171, *ANET*, 173). Genesis 15:3 implies that if Abraham were to have a son with a slave woman, that child would be a rightful heir. All of a sudden, Sarah grasps the likeness of the boys and sees in the son of Hagar—notably, not even the narrator views Ishmael as Sarah's progeny, although that is certainly the intent in 16:2—a detestable threat to Isaac's promise through her "real" son. As long as Ishmael is around, he is the rightful heir to the promise, and seeing him being Isaac-like is a constant reminder of that threat.

Unlike her passive mistreatment in Gen 16, this time Sarah blatantly demands that Abraham get rid of the two outsiders in order to ensure that Isaac has no rival for his inheritance. The shift in Sarah's attitude toward Hagar and Ishmael is notable in her choice of words. Whereas Sarah once referred to her as "my slave girl" (שפחהי), Hagar has now become "this slave woman" (האמה הזאת). Victor Hamilton (1995, 80) notes that the status of a שפחה and an אמה are not synonymous, and in fact Hagar has

become a second wife to Abraham. Hagar has moved up in status, but in Sarah's eyes she is still a lowly slave, now even further removed from Sarah. Hagar's status is reinforced by Sarah's demands that Abraham "drive out" the woman and her son, and the text reverberates her feeling toward Hagar. The verb *גרש* is undoubtedly intentional and not at all related to the notion of divorce.<sup>1</sup> The same verb is used both in reference to Pharaoh driving out Israel from Egypt as an act of divine deliverance (Exod 6:1; 11:1) and twice in Joshua in reference to God annihilating the Amorites from before Israel in their conquest of Canaan (Josh 24:12, 18). I am not arguing that Gen 21 is in any way familiar with the text of Joshua, but more appropriately that an Israelite reader/hearer would likely have understood the connection from a canonical perspective.

Like the Canaanites, who threaten the purity of the promise, Hagar and Ishmael are a threat to the lineage of Abraham and must be driven out of their midst. In this story *גרש* is reminiscent of deliverance from Egypt turned on its head; this time, the Israelites do the driving out of the Egyptians. The image of conquest and subsequent annihilation of the Canaanites is strong, as is the notion that Hagar and Ishmael are the outsiders to be handled. The role of Hagar and Ishmael as the Canaanites in the text could not be made clearer.

God assures a troubled Abraham not to worry, because it is Isaac who will carry his line—Ishmael is irrelevant to that cause—and so he casts Hagar and Ishmael out with limited provisions (21:14). Just before their certain death, a nonchalant God shows up and asks, "What troubles you, Hagar?"—surely an insulting question. Whereas Hagar answers God's rhetorical inquiry quite calmly in 16:8—albeit "with clenched teeth"—God does not give her an opportunity to reply here (Gunkel 1997, 187). An honest answer would undoubtedly have included mention of her personal sexual exploitation, her son's disinheritance, their starvation and imminent death in the wilderness, and their homelessness and vulnerability in the world—not to mention the fact that the entire ordeal stems from her mere obedience to her mistress's demands. In the text, she is voiceless. God's response is simple: lift up the boy, and I will make a great nation of him (21:18). This time, they need not return to the hostility from which

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1. On *גרש* in connection with divorce, see McCarter 1984, 324. Hamilton (1995, 79) disagrees with this approach, stating that, even given the evidence that the term refers to divorce elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, it is unlikely that Sarah is calling for Abraham to divorce Hagar.

they were driven, thus leaving a new source for anxiety: Where will Ishmael's nation *be*? What will be their place of belonging? How will it relate to any sense of family or community for these two?

### Genesis 21 and Native Americans

Notably, Hagar and Ishmael are not indigenous characters in the text. At the onset of the story, Hagar is an Egyptian living in Hebron, and as such is already removed from her native land. In fact there are no truly indigenous characters here at all. If there is a Native American perspective in the text, it is certainly that of Hagar and Ishmael, and it does not take an incredible imagination to see parallels between this story and Native American experiences. Abuse at the hand of dominant culture, exploitation, forced assimilation, and disinheritance from their rightful lands are all-too-familiar experiences in the history of Native America. Further, the two have little agency or self-determination, as their fate lies in the hands of the culture that lords over them, embodied in the figures of Abraham and Sarah.

### Genesis 21 as Objectionable Story

Genesis 21 contains a number of elements that a Native American reader would no doubt find objectionable. First, Hagar and Ishmael serve markedly utilitarian roles in the story—that is, they function only to build up the dominant characters but possess no opportunity to act on behalf of their own self-interest. Hagar's sexual exploitation is not surprising, given the role of sexualization in the dispossession of the indigene, but seeing it coming does not make it any more palatable (Bailey 2005, 20). At first, Hagar is undeniably valuable—almost salvific—for perpetuating Abraham's lineage, and the child of their union is surely the first tangible sign that Abraham's bloodline will not die with him. Ishmael, however, is welcome only until he is no longer needed; once Isaac is born and the promise is fully realized, Ishmael is no longer useful. As a nonfactor in the future of Israel, he is removed from the scene.

Although 21:11 depicts Abraham as distressed “on account of the boy,” any indication that such concern is tied to the welfare of his firstborn son is negated with God's response: “Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for *it is through Isaac that offspring will be named for you*” (21:12).

The message is not that he should not worry because Hagar and Ishmael will be safe in the wilderness, but rather that Abraham's *lineage* is not in jeopardy and thus *he* should feel safe. Thus, Yahweh condones casting out Abraham's own (second) wife and child to the wilderness because the real issue at hand—Abraham's own security—is not in question.

Another indicator of the indigenes' powerlessness in relation to dominant culture is their identification throughout Gen 21. The name divinely bestowed on Ishmael in 16:11 literally means "God hears" (16:11b), yet Ishmael is ironically nameless throughout Gen 21. Is this because God has stopped taking note?—if not God, certainly Sarah and Abraham. Numerous times the text refers to Isaac by name, but Ishmael is referred to as "the son of the slave girl" or simply "the boy." So obvious is his namelessness against the prominence of Isaac's name that it implies attempts to ensure that the reader not confuse Abraham's firstborn son of a slave girl with his "real" son—Isaac, who has a name and is the full inheritor in Yahweh's promise. God reinforces such language when assuring Abraham that his lineage will continue through Isaac and not "the son of the slave woman" (21:12–13).

Even when God shows up to rescue them, it is notably without address or mentioning Ishmael by name:

And God heard the voice of *the boy*; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid, for God has heard the voice of *the boy* where he is. Come, lift up *the boy* and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of *him*." Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water and gave *the boy* a drink. (21:17–19)

The absence of the name Ishmael (יִשְׁמָעֵאל) is ironic, given that God "heard" (וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים) him crying—twice, using the same root as his name! In fact, not once is Ishmael named in all of Gen 21, as if alerting readers that he should no longer be the object of their focus. It is not that Ishmael has no name, but rather that his time in the spotlight is over; his name has been rendered unimportant.

Perhaps the greatest insight into the role of Hagar and Ishmael in the text results from an examination of God's attitude toward the two. At first glance, the Hagar-Ishmael story portrays a questionable and somewhat objectionable image of God. First, after fleeing humiliation at the hand of Sarah, God sends Hagar back to her abusive mistress to "submit to her" (16:9). According to von Rad (1972, 194), "Yahweh will not condone the



breach of legal regulations”; after all, Yahweh is a God of rules. This God of rules is also the God who hears the cry of the oppressed in Egypt, yet is comfortable sentencing Hagar and Ishmael to mistreatment at the hands of Sarah and Abraham. Yahweh is also culpable in the constant focus on promise to Abraham and the great nation he will evolve into—even to the detriment of the voiceless figures in the text—when telling Abraham to do this troubling thing. When Hagar and Ishmael are eventually exiled, Yahweh endorses—even encourages—their expulsion. Mingling is rarely a good thing to Yahweh, as evidenced throughout the Torah, and we should expect nothing less with regard to children of the promise.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the product of a union between an Egyptian slave girl and her Hebrew master is an unacceptable beginning to the lineage Yahweh promises. Such synthesis threatens the purity and healthy boundaries of which Yahweh is so fond. As is the case elsewhere in the canon, the presence of a foreigner threatens the security and identity of Israel, and for this reason is cast out in order to preserve the purity necessary for this chosen people (see especially Ezra 9–10; Neh 13:23–31). Somehow that sharp divide and demand for purity carries more weight for the reader when this intermingling is found within a human figure than in the foods allowed in a meal or the materials worn by an Israelite priest. To be sure, the story expresses alarming characteristics of God and implicit demands for purity of bloodline. Abraham has a son, but that son is not good enough to be the next chapter in Israel’s story due to his liminal status both within and apart from the Israelite community.

### Genesis 21: A Generous Reading

If Warrior’s debut of Native American hermeneutics left us with a bad taste in our mouths, is this one any better? So far, this Native reading seems equally displeased with the text’s characterization of God and the treatment of the Native voices at the hand of dominant culture. We who read the Bible canonically also see the tensions ahead. The Israelites will eventually be commanded to never wrong or oppress the stranger or alien (גר) in their land and to treat them as full members of the Israelite community if they choose, “for you were aliens/strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exod 22:21; Deut 10:19; and surely others). Yet here we see Yahweh advocating for their rejection. God the Deliverer is also God the Disinheritor. The story of Hagar’s and Ismael’s rejection exemplifies the tension between maintaining purity and caring for the oppressed, which exists throughout

the Israelite narrative. *Is there a way to redeem the story of their rejection?* God, I hope so. A generous reading reveals a more positive and pluralistic understanding of the parallel nations ruled by Abraham's eldest sons.

Although an inappropriate heir to the Israelite promise, a redemptive reading cannot discredit the fact that God does, in fact, take note of Ishmael, as his name would imply. Ishmael (יִשְׁמָעֵאל) literally means "God hears, God takes note." Yahweh's auspicious declaration that he will "greatly multiply [Hagar's] offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude" (Gen 16:10) and Yahweh's vow to "make a great nation" of Ishmael (21:18) both resound with striking similarities to Abraham's promise (12:2). Further, God hears Ishmael's cry in the wilderness and provides salvation from his certain demise (21:17–19). Remembering Ishmael's blessing in the womb, we remember from Gen 16:11–12 that Ishmael will be a "wild ass of a man"—that is, wild and free, without boundaries or restraints—which is no doubt a positive message given the context.

Common understanding that Ishmael's hand will be *against* everyone and their hands *against* him is based on a rare (if attested) translation of a tiny preposition (כּ). A much simpler translation befitting the blessing context would be as follows: Ishmael's hand will be "*with* all" (בְּכָל), and he will dwell "alongside all his kinsmen" (עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-אֶחָיו), notably not "at odds with all his kin." The same construction is used in Gen 25:18 when Ishmael settles in Shur: "he settled down alongside all of his people/kin." It is the exact same vocabulary that translators render "at odds with all his kin." Von Rad (1972, 194) notes that this is a good, solid blessing, and that Ishmael will be "a real Bedouin." What exegetes have deemed "difficult to translate" is actually really simple Hebrew (Zucker 2012, 3–4). Ishmael will dwell in the wilderness as a free man, and his hand *with* everyone—or even more appropriately "all [things]"—in harmony with his land and his people.

This blessing is reinforced when Hagar and Ishmael are cast out in Gen 21. While we might view Yahweh's apparent disengagement of Ishmael from the rest of the story as unsatisfactory, the text is clear that, when God meets the two in the wilderness, Yahweh does not abandon them. In fact, God provides for them in their immediate need by supplying them with a well to sustain them—surely enough that they can both drink amply and fill their skins before setting out again. Moreover, the text tells us that, as Ishmael grew up, "God was *with* the boy" (21:20). Still, Ishmael's deliverance is predicated on exclusion from the divine inheritance, as the "great nation" that Yahweh will establish for Ishmael will be removed from the

story of Israel. Instead, Ishmael and Isaac will both experience greatness, but from within distinct positions within disconnected nations. Connotations of segregation, forced migration, even “separate but equal” come to mind. As Hamilton (1995, 81) puts it, “As Cain suffered both banishment from the divine and protection by the divine, so Ishmael is both loser and winner, cut off from what should be his but promised a significant lineage.” Thus, building on Warrior’s terminology, Yahweh here is understood as both a God of promise and a God of dispossession and disinheritance.

Ishmael’s freedom and autonomy—his deliverance—lies in this wilderness in which he finally finds a home. His sense of belonging in the wilderness is foreshadowed when he is blessed with wildness in the womb (16:12). Ishmael eventually settles in the wilderness of Paran—the same place that Yahweh later appears to the Hebrews during their postexodus wilderness wandering (Num 10:12; Deut 33:22). Wilderness as a place of struggle and isolation is of course a negative thing, but the Hebrew Bible depicts the wilderness as much more. In the wilderness, Yahweh provides for the Hebrews, and it is where the Israelites are most intimate with Yahweh (Neh 9:19–21; Hos 2:16–17), even though at times the wilderness can also be a place of danger and terror (Hos 2:3). The wilderness is also a place of trust and the home of justice (Isa 32:16), where Yahweh woos the Israelites like a bride (Jer 2:2), and a motif of security (Ezek 34:25). There are dangers and terrors in the wilderness, but it is also a place of refuge and safety (Jer 48:6).

Ishmael’s life in the wilderness is not a sentence but a blessing; in this text, it is a liberating space for Ishmael. What could be considered an “assimilation experiment” in Gen 16 was unsuccessful, but Gen 21 offers Ishmael and Hagar a life free from the confines of a culture that was never theirs. Now, settled in the uncontrolled wilderness, they have a renewed sense of community with their kinsmen, apart from the exploitation and rejection of the Israelite community, to which they do not fully belong.

Here we find the strongest evidence for redeeming God and the text for Native American readers. Hagar and Ishmael have been used and disenfranchised by dominant culture embodied in the figures of Sarah and Hagar—to a degree even God!—but they have also been liberated from their oppression by being released from the abusive system entirely. True, Ishmael has been robbed of his rightful inheritance and any role he might have in the divine promise, but in exchange is offered a life lived on his own terms, with a *different* blessing and a *different* story. God knows that this removal is a blessing, even if Ishmael and Hagar do not, so Yahweh

releases them from it altogether. The Israelite story to come will be unnecessarily difficult for someone such as Ishmael, as Mary Ann Tolbert (2005, 12–13) rightly affirms: “In light of the Exodus meta-narrative, the experience of oppression does not teach compassion and tolerance, but anger, self-justification, and self-aggrandizement.” Yahweh frees Ishmael from that narrative.

As a foreigner living among Abraham and his people, Hagar is an explicit outsider in the text. Ishmael, however, is the product of Hagar/Egyptian/slave and Abraham/Hebrew/power, and thus is a child of two worlds. The story is fraught with the tension of Ishmael’s dual identity throughout—insider, outcast, rejected, blessed. One might assume that he has the ability to choose between the two identities within him, but those in power make that decision for him. Ishmael is a morphing of both dominant culture and his minority status, and for that he is removed from the scene. His minority status offsets his claim to inheritance or participation in the Israelite community. His dominant blood is not powerful enough to sway his liminal status toward Israel, but instead points him out to the wilderness, where he belongs.

Why does Hagar not take her child back to Egypt to raise him among her people? Again, the answer lies in the power of the wilderness. Given her slavery under Sarah, Hagar likely would have been a slave in Egypt as well, and, as the son of a slave, Ishmael would not have been free. Instead, they settle in wilderness of Paran, which is, like Ishmael, fittingly between Israel and Egypt. Paran is the space between two lives of servitude for Ishmael and Hagar. To the west lay slavery to dominant culture; to the east, slavery and the old way of life in Egypt. The wilderness offers a space between both worlds where Ishmael can grow and thrive with autonomy and self-determination. Ishmael’s territory eventually stretches from Shur to Havilah—a vast wilderness, to be sure—with his own lineage and tribal structure (25:18). There, in the wilderness, we can assume that God makes good on the promise to prosper Ishmael. Surely Ishmael settles “alongside all his kin” (16:12)—both Egyptian and Israelite alike—in his literal and figurative wilderness.

The wilderness as emancipation redeems the unsavory treatment of the Natives in the text, if only to a degree. This reading of Gen 21:1–21 may offer hope in the form of parallel nations with parallel stories, the implications of which for Native American biblical hermeneutics raise new questions: Can we really all be in one place? Do we even need to try? Can the Bible serve the Native American community if it is apparently removed

from Israel's story? We might even go so far as to ask with William Jones (1973) whether the God of the Bible is a white racist, but for our purposes it is more appropriate to question whether the God of the Bible can still be Ishmael's God. These questions are too weighty to answer based simply on one narrative in Genesis; thus we must remain focused on Ishmael and his mother as the Native voices in *this* text.

Despite the rejection of Ishmael from the Israelite line, chosenness need not be regarded as unique to Abraham and Isaac. But remember: the Genesis narrative is not actually Ishmael's story. *It is Isaac's* (Weems 1991, 33). The Bible is not the history of everyone, but rather the sacred history of Israel, a specific group of people telling their own story, replete with overriding national focus (Okoye 2007, 164). Although the Hebrew Bible does not tell it, Ishmael does have a story of his own, one in which he thrives as a parallel nation alongside his brother. In that story, set in the wilderness, Ishmael is distinct and free and blessed, and most notably *sovereign*. In this regard, the text can be incredibly liberating to anyone who finds oneself outside or under the hand of the dominant culture, especially the Native American reader. You who identify with Hagar and Ishmael no longer have to submit to that which holds you back, abuses you, uses you for personal gain. Instead, you are free in a place that can be *your own* and over which you possess as much control as you choose to exercise. Here is a place where you can be truly unfettered and build your own story, in the wilderness, where Yahweh is close.

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## Engagement

Jione Havea

Dear editors,  
Dear contributors,  
Dear readers,

Sorry, but i am not completely grateful for nor deeply annoyed with this extra assignment. Why? In my contribution i mused around aliens, waterholes, and leagues in Gen 21. Yes, i did not want to focus on Hagar and Ishmael. The reason for that was that i felt that Hagar and Ishmael, thanks to recent publications, are not as minoritized as they used to be (e.g., when Phyllis Tribble and Delores Williams offered their readings). The status of Hagar and Ishmael in the eyes of biblical scholarship has changed, similar to the changing status of minoritized reading communities, as we read about African American women in the contribution by the late Lynne St. Clair Darden. So i wanted to do something different, by looking at other minoritized subjects in Gen 21. And, similar to Linzie M. Treadway, i also wanted to draw attention to indigenous subjects and voices in the stories—aliens (in the eyes of the Hebrew narrative), waterholes, and leagues allowed me to do this.

This extra assignment thus puts my feet to the heat (or, the burning ground of the wilderness), so to speak, and this serves me right! I am grateful to my fellow contributors for the excuse and energy to again muse around Hagar and Ishmael, and there are twists and turns in each of the essays that pull me back to their stories. And some that hold me back.

Reading the essays by Ahida Calderón Pilarski and Henry W. Morisada Rietz together energizes me. The stories of Hagar, a single mother, and Ishmael, a bastard, could function as wells for thirsty minority/minoritized people in their struggles (when life feels like a wilderness, as

seen from urban biases). There are already so many single mothers and bastard children in every corner of the world, and many more to come especially from countries at war or under occupation and from among communities of refugees. Single mothers and bastard children, by force or by choice, could find some meanings (if not comfort as well) in the stories of Hagar and Ishmael (as read and presented by Calderón Pilarski and Morisada Rietz).

Nonetheless, i feel Treadway's pain, for those same stories raise critical questions, especially when read in the interests of Native Americans (a diverse lot, like our Pasifika natives), about this part of Scripture and the God it portrays. In Gen 16 and 21, God comes across as a nasty character (e.g., by finding and sending a single mother back to submit to the mistress who wanted her gone) who does not respond to a woman's cry (but hears the boy-child). Another text of terror. Another terror'able God.

Juxtaposing the readings by Calderón Pilarski, Morisada Rietz, and Treadway raises at least two questions for me: Should these stories be redeemed? Should God be rescued from these stories? I suspect that readers of this collection of essays would have different responses to these questions. Great! I duck from my questions by saying that i am not comfortable with why stories preserved in the interests of the people of Israel (also a diverse lot) be endorsed, again and again, with the affirmation of minority voices and minoritized reading communities. This collection adds to the mix more reading communities—Native Americans, African American women, Japanese (Americans), and Latina Americans. Now that i'm in this mood, and being non-American, why let white Americans determine what passes as full or real American? And what are we diverse lot of minoritized readers going to do when some of our white American colleagues and friends claim that they too are in some ways minority/minoritized?

Over twenty-five years ago, when Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah (1991) orchestrated the first *Voices from the Margin*, the rhetoric of marginalization and of reading from the margin was taken as a Third World project. Then, it was not taken as real scholarship. Nowadays, several mainline scholars (at the centers of power and scholarship) and some dominant public and ecclesial movements (in the "first worlds") carry the banners of margins and marginalized approaches and show that the Third World is everywhere. The upshot is the chipping away of the radicalness of marginality. And the third worlds everywhere are still impoverished and racialized.

For me, the radical edge of marginality requires minority/minoritized readers such as us to resist the God in the stories of Hagar and Ishmael, and to protest against the “Israel” that benefits from those stories. On these matters, Darden points at a possible path: revised scripturalizations in light of our changing status. For those of us who enjoy mocking and subverting the dominant narration, Darden proposes that we mimic it instead, so that we use the masters’ tools to dismantle the masters’ house(s). The status of women changes but, in the case of Hagar and Ishmael as well, patriarchy is the master that “will never give women any real power.” Darden’s words are poignant and troubling, even as she rests in peace. This patriarchy serves the interest of a particular people and their God. Put another way, let us not allow our class and color differences to distract us from the masters’ oppressive systemic power.

So what? In another twenty-five years, if we live long enough, we shall see what becomes of minority/minoritized criticism. Currently, many minority/minoritized readers are not welcomed in the houses of the masters of biblical scholarship. Some are publicly humiliated and called to be dismissed, for the sake of protecting the traditional views concerning the God who terrorizes minority/minoritized subjects such as Hagar, a single mother, and Ishmael, a bastard. So tell me, my dear friends, why should we redeem these stories and rescue this God?

Fine, these stories provide meanings and some (painful) comfort for single mothers, bastards, Blacks, natives, and other minoritized subjects. In the shadows of Darden, may we scripturalize some more and find more meanings, as well as find ways and courage to resist the patrons of these stories and protest their terror’able God.

Also, let us encourage our children to embrace the radicalness of marginality. This lot includes my almost six-year-old daughter, whose life started as a bastard, but her status changes every day.

Finally, it turns out that i enjoyed and learned much from this extra assignment (but most of my students still find extra assignments painful). *Takeikaupē* (in solidarity),

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Ahida Calderón Pilarski

Preparing this response has been an empowering journey. In drinking from the living wells of my colleagues, I have been able to see through their eyes the story of Hagar and Ishmael in Gen 21 anew.

The contributions in this section of the volume show two important areas of empowerment; both, in my view, expand the understanding of minoritized biblical criticism. First is the theorizing that takes place through the authors' development of insights and concepts; this theorizing is definitely an asset in the analytical process as it furnishes the needed terminology to articulate their interpretations. A second area revolves around the reenvisioning of the methodological dimension in the interpretive process. I elaborate on these two areas.

First, the theorizing. As I argue in my own contribution to this volume, a necessary step in the critical reading of (biblical) texts is for the critic to identify her or his stance, and this step of reflection should include a re-vision of the theoretical frameworks informing the critic's reading(s) and interpretation(s). This step should be a requirement for *all* critics, not just for those from minoritized groups. This step can reveal the strength of diverse perspectives as well as adequately elucidating the contextual polysemy in the interpretative process. In this particular volume, as racial/ethnic minoritized scholars approach a biblical text, powerful *insights* and *concepts* come to the fore in their reading of Gen 21. Here are a few examples of relevant insights and concepts emerging throughout their essays (emphasized in *italic*). Jione Havea explains that it is through an Islander's lens that he is able to shift his focus of analysis and distinguish the *undersides* of the stories. This lens uncovers subtle dynamics in the interactions of central and not-so-central characters, and he determines that, in this case, "aliens, waterholes, and leagues" play an important role in his reading of Gen 21. This lens allows him also to distinguish two parts in this chapter where the division creates opportunities for incorporating two important concepts from Islanders' cultural context: *relating* and *reciprocity*. Another powerful insight is found in Linzie M. Treadway's reading of Gen 21 from a Native American lens. From this perspective, she sees in the narratives about Ishmael and Hagar, as set in the wilderness, a story of people who are free, blessed, and *sovereign*. When seeing the story in this way, it can be a liberating experience for those who find themselves "outside or under the hand of a dominant culture." Finally, from a Japanese (American) lens, Henry

W. Morisada Rietz offers his personal life experience as the lens through which an approach can uncover the dynamics of identity-making with/in cultural/ethnic traditions. His intention is to *destabilize* arguments about *legitimacy and authenticity* by refocusing on the *agency* and *responsibility of readers*, especially when reading texts that construct identity. Equally important are some key concepts that emerged throughout these contributions. From an African American perspective, the late Lynne St. Clair Darden finds that some concepts from postcolonial studies—such as *hybridity*, *mimicry*, and *ambivalence*—are effective in developing a critical awareness of a community and its praxis. In my own work, from a Latina perspective, I also include concepts from decolonial studies such as *colonial semiosis* and *border thinking*.

I now reflect on the second area: elements of methodology I observed from these essays. Two approaches underscored relevant methodological features: Darden's *scripturalization* and Morisada Rietz's *hybridity readings* that provide strategies of negotiation. According to Darden, scripturalization allows communities to perform an act of critical conscientization. Through writing texts, the communities become agents in the conceptualization and reconceptualization of their praxis. In the case of African American communities, Darden argues that it is time to find alternative scripturalization of the Hagar narrative that can address the reality and challenge of cultural hybridity. A similar call to consider seriously the nature of hybridity is found in Morisada Rietz's essay. He points out that the hybridity of readings regarding Japanese (American) family values can also reveal the dis/inherent readings of the (biblical) text. Hybrid readings serve as strategies of negotiation that over time show that traditions are unstable and at times fictive, especially those that construct identity. In my own essay I highlight the relevance of *praxis* as a methodological framework. This framework revitalizes and brings to the fore the life context(s) of the communities in the interpretive process then and now. In this sense, I think that scripturalization and hybridity readings enrich and expand the horizons of possibilities in the effort of finding connections/relations to foundational sacred texts that remain relevant for diverse communities today and in the future.

In the looming horizon of biblical studies, it is essential for minoritized biblical criticism to continue this critical theorizing, and the contributions in this section are exemplars of this effort. One could say that the dominant approaches in biblical studies have the advantage of time, centuries that, given the historical and geopolitical forces at play in higher

education, have fueled their refinement and dominance within a sole paradigm. However, fortunately, it is also time that has uncovered many epistemological limitations in the dominant paradigm. I think that what a twenty-first-century education requires is no longer a shift of paradigms—a new one debunking the old/dominant one. Biblical studies should build students' capacity to navigate through diverse paradigms. As existing and emerging diverse perspectives continue to advance discourses through different paradigms, a responsible critic must respect the validity that each voice brings into the conversation and move forward toward the new or expanding horizon.

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Henry W. Morisada Rietz

Reading and interpretation involve a multitude of theoretical and philological as well as imaginative moves and choices. We attend to different passages, privilege different characters, create different meanings. Both Ahida Calderón Pilarski and Jione Havea draw our attention to wells and waterholes and they, along with Lynne St. Clair Darden and Linzie M. Treadway, discuss the multivalent meanings of wilderness. As I read the essays, I imagine us gathering around a waterhole in an ambiguous wilderness telling our stories. I also hear voices of those scholars who have been our conversation partners as well as the communities that have nurtured us. Through these other voices, we each attest to the complexity of our communities and identities. All of us are careful to acknowledge the internal diversity of our communities, and the specificity of identities enables the richness of our interpretation. We all embrace notions of hybridity and double-consciousness in particular ways.

Darden's concern is that the political and economic diversity of African American women demands other readings of the Hagar narrative. While she acknowledges the important work done by traditional African American contrapuntal readings, she raises the concern that those traditional reading will not appeal to many African American women today, who may be more attracted to the character of Sarai/Sarah and who may not see the patriarchal narrative, and thus not critique the patriarchal system in which we live. I think her concerns are being realized with the rising popularity of prosperity gospels in the new Black church, such as T. D. Jakes's brand of *Woman Thou Art Loosed*, which focus on individuals rather than the community, thereby reinforcing rather than challenging systems of oppression (see, e.g., McGee 2017).

I share with Darden the approach of revealing the multiplicity and ambivalence of cultural membership and identity construction. Her discussion of the characters in the film *Daughters of the Dust* in tandem with the Genesis story effectively does that. Cultural artifacts are continuously being manufactured, preserved, devalued, or lost. She draws our attention to the purpose and ethical goals of this cultural activity. I resonate with Darden's emphasis on how collective cultural memory makes the past meaningful within specific cultural and temporal contexts. The ambiguity provides the opportunity to be self-critical so that our identity construction continues to destabilize rather than reify oppressive power structures. Her phrase "the strangeness of home" to describe the continued minoritization of African Americans and her cautionary interpretation of Barack Obama's speeches are now even more poignant after the election of Donald Trump in 2016 and the way that white nationalist Trump supporters mimic/mock the rhetoric of identity politics. I add that revealing the ambiguity of our cultural constructions can help to destabilize other cultural constructions, especially the mimicry/mockery of white nationalists.

Pilarski's discussion highlights the importance of *praxis*, drawing on the rich traditions of liberation theology. Her particular reading emerges out of her life experiences, leading her to develop a reading for single Latina mothers and more broadly single parents. As with the other writers, she emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches to represent the reality of the people she serves as well the intricacies of the biblical narrative. Her attention to ethnicity, gender, and the socioeconomic dynamics reveals a richly meaningful characterization of Hagar that includes immigrant, fugitive, divorcee, and mother. Her goal of praxis does not merely allow her to articulate a scholarly interpretation, as she has done, but compels her to make this work accessible to people in her community for their empowerment.

Treadway is attuned to the many ways that the biblical texts, especially their portrayal of God, can be disturbing to Native Americans. I see her reflecting the experiences of Native Americans being caricatured in the dominant American media in the way she highlights the utilitarian role of Hagar and Ishmael in the narrative. She sees Hagar being commanded to return to Sarai and Abraham in Gen 16 as a form of "forced assimilation," which also produced her identity as a descendant of both Indian and European ancestors. Her reading of Ishmael's threatening behavior in Gen 21:10 as "'Isaacing' or 'playing Isaac'" reminds me how destructive children *playing* "cowboys and Indians" or teams *playing* "the Redskins" and

“Braves” can be. As she points out, the verb “driving out” (גרש), done to Hagar and Ishmael, reverberates with the exodus and conquest narratives, and so “God the Deliverer” is at the same time Robert Warrior’s “God the Conqueror.” She builds on the disturbing aspects of the narrative—especially for me as *hapa* and the history of Japanese (American) emphasis on the *chonan*—with an intertextual discussion of the purity regulations and the ideology of separation, which casts “God the Deliverer” as “God the Disinheritor.” Without ignoring these troubling aspects, Treadway offers a “generous” reading that also finds redemption in the narrative. She sees the departure into the wilderness as being freed from an abusive system to live life “with a different blessing and a different story.” In this separate existence, in the wilderness of Paran—“between Israel and Egypt”—Ishmael is distinct and free and blessed, and notably *sovereign*. She has found in the narrative sustenance for Native American “pursuance of political sovereignty alongside civil rights and equality.” In this I see an opportunity but also the peril for Native Americans and other indigenous peoples who are still overpowered by the dominant societies and nation states. Bringing this back to my own community, I see the opportunity provided by the migration of my Japanese (American) ancestors—forced by economic and social conditions—to find another home in Hawai‘i. But I also see the peril of both their being minoritized by the larger American culture and their simultaneous minoritizing of others in Hawai‘i, especially the indigenous Kanaka Maoli (so-called native Hawai‘ians), as well as the danger of reifying their own notions of purity.

Havea draws our attention to neglected aspects of the text and includes a section of the narrative, Gen 21:22–34, that the rest of us ignore. He splashes about the text, reveling in the ambiguities and connections. He beckons me to join him to play in the shore break, where waterholes, territories, and bodies tumble together in the surf where ocean and the beach shift back and forth. Havea’s attention to undersides leads me to ruminate a bit more with him on the significance in the narrative of the planting of the tamarisk tree (21:33–34). While these trees may grow tall and provide shade (e.g., 1 Sam 22:6), they may also dry up the resources of desert water with their high water requirement (Jacob and Jacob). Was Abraham cultivating the land or poisoning the well? Through his reading of the Genesis narrative, Havea interrogates “who are the aliens.” I am most challenged by his assertion that “no alien is without a place. One becomes an alien when one is away from some place one knows and calls home.” Where is my home? Certainly Hawai‘i is a home, with which I maintain a relation-



ship. Hawai'i is a real place, whose cultures continue to change, but it also has a fictive character that I use to construct my identity. Like the Issei and Nisei, who reify a period in Japanese history and culture, I am negotiating the Hawai'i of my youth with the Hawai'i of the present as I move between Hawai'i and the United States mainland. Hawai'i is also a place where the breaking waves of social forces of the past provide me with privileges, but also crash down on other locals, especially the more recent immigrants along with the Kanaka Maoli. Although my relatives have welcomed me, my relationship with the larger Japanese (American) community feels fraught at times. Such is the place of the bastard.

Although we have offered different readings and interpretations, we are all seeking to make the story meaningful in our context. But our conversation is not merely academic. Each of us in our own ways is seeking to promote ethical, responsible, empowering readings. I hope the conversation continues.

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Linzie M. Treadway

As evidenced by this collection of essays, the practice of biblical minority criticism is an intricate and multidimensional exercise. As readers, we approach each text, or interpretive prism, with different eyes and lenses, thus bringing meaning to our hermeneutics. Beyond our initial evaluation, we are also constantly turning the prism, looking through different facets to see how the light strikes, and using these observations as additional tools for our interpretation. As such, individual hermeneutics are as numerous as the readers considering the text, as demonstrated here. Because of the distinctiveness of each reading, given the lenses we bring to the text, certain key guidelines must remain clearly at the forefront and inform our practice.

We must first remember that in offering a minoritized reading of Gen 21—or any text, for that matter—we bring to our exegesis a specific understanding of what it means to be minoritized, as well as unique life experiences that occur within that identity. Undoubtedly, there is no singular

understanding of being Native American, nor do all Native peoples share similar outlooks and worldviews. I cannot and would not dare to speak on behalf of all Native peoples, nor can my colleagues speak on behalf of all Islander, African American, Latinx, and Japanese (American) people. Within each of our communities exist microcommunities and subcultures with individual lifeblood and manifestations distinct even from those in their shared communities. Lynne St. Clair Darden keenly points to this important detail as she notes that the traditional African American interpretation of our pericope may no longer be the best or most viable option for all African American women. For those of us familiar with reader-response theory, this declaration seems overly simple and obvious, but it bears repeating for the sake of clarity. Each reading in this volume is *a* reading from a particular perspective—one of myriad—not *the* reading on behalf of their respective communities. I am acutely aware that my experience is distinct from so many of my indigenous family, and it is critical that we proceed with transparency and caution before veering into generalities and oversimplification of the task at hand.

Similarly, we must state explicitly the role that intersectionality plays in the process of minoritized hermeneutics. As I present my analysis of the text, it is equally important to note that in addition to being a person of Native heritage, I am a product of much more than only my racial identity. I am also a queer female who grew up of low socioeconomic status in the rural southern United States. Equally influential, I am also cisgender, not disabled, educated, gainfully employed, and have what most would consider white skin. As such, I am certainly not without significant power, agency, and numerous other benefits of dominant culture. All of this I carry with me as I navigate dominant culture—most notably, all of which I bring to my biblical interpretation. Intersectionality is an intricate gift that provides additional layers of depth from which to create meaning, but it also makes it impossible to offer a unilaterally minoritized reading from a particular race, gender, or other identity.

With these cautions well defined, we press on with our engagement of Gen 21, a text that poses obvious challenges for any exegete. Approaching the text from his identity as a *hapa* bastard, Henry W. Morisada Rietz pushes against the notion that the majority of biblical texts portray a liberating and benevolent God. Critical for our efforts, Rietz accurately notes, “sometimes one does not have the privilege of hoping for liberation.” Drawing significant parallels to his Japanese (American) culture, Rietz subverts traditional notions of legitimacy and patriarchy in his

reading and calls us to carefully consider how these texts both include and exclude. Ahida Calderón Pilarski's focus is on decolonizing the text from a Latina perspective, which she achieves while also cleverly playing on the idea of the "well in the wilderness," representing the locus of minoritized hermeneutics in the field of biblical scholarship. She asks us what this well would look like through the eyes of Latina single mothers, presenting Hagar's story as one with which Latina single mothers would certainly resonate. Hagar is a woman emancipated from her bondage who overcomes unthinkable adversity to reclaim her freedom and "in the end, she stays ... in the margins, but no longer marginalized" (Pilarski, citing Latvus). Appropriately articulating the complexity and nonhomogeneity of their experiences, Darden's piece builds on the idea that some African American women no longer identify as being "in the wilderness" and calls for a reimagination of traditional hermeneutics such as that of Delores Williams. She warns against narratives that no longer mock dominant ideas—part of their innate power—but instead mimic them, thus contributing to the status quo and promoting inequality. Finally, Jione Havea's interpretation of Gen 21 includes the relationship between Abraham and Abimelech in Gen 21:22–34, a related but distinctive turn from the primary focus on Hagar and Ishmael in Gen 21:1–21. His *Islander* lens centers on the waterholes (markedly nonhuman but still incredibly significant), aliens, and leagues in the text, notably "subjects that Gen 21 ignores, abandons, forgets."

Unmistakably, Gen 21 lends itself to abundant minoritized readings and in this way contains the potential for infinite understandings. Each of these scripturalizations, to borrow Darden's terminology, is a distinct, intersectional, incredibly heterogeneous look at the prism from unique and divergent places. But this volume contains only a snapshot of innumerable interpretations. The praxis of minoritized criticism is imperative to the ongoing transformation of biblical hermeneutics. When present, we must reconsider previous and even classic interpretations, not because they lack value but because they deserve new life. We must reimagine, revive, reinterpret, and reinvent these narratives again and again, in order to allow the text to continue speaking to a changing world. We must continue to present perspectives that have never been attempted, creating space at the table for views that have been continuously silenced or ignored. As we turn the prism, we will likely find genuinely disappointing, even oppressive depictions of the divine. But turn the prism, shift our point of view, look closer, and we can see more. The future of biblical scholarship depends on our

willingness to look with new eyes and to shift the text and our perspectives. Then, most importantly, we must invite others to look and ask with genuine curiosity, “What do *you* see hidden here?”

## 1 Kings 21



## Masked Theft: Postcolonial Reading of 1 Kings 21

Steed Vernyl Davidson

The narrative of the monarchal appropriation of Naboth's vineyard simulates an anticolonial text. This story, set within the Deuteronomistic History with particular views of Ahab and his foreign imported wife, Jezebel, appears to paint the native landholder, Naboth, as the victim of monarchal excesses. The chapter sits as a delicious treat in the midst of the Deuteronomistic History that opens with the preparations for the conquest of the land of Canaan (Josh 1:10–11). Having arrived at this passage in 1 Kings, most readers are ready for a full-throated denunciation of murder, power plays, and displacement, having read the conquest narratives of Joshua, the gory tales of dismemberment and femicide in Judges, and the confused emergence of the monarchy in the books of Samuel.

The Elijah cycle of stories offers readers a champion of the marginalized and dispossessed and therefore sets up expectations of the prophet as a bulwark against the excesses of monarchal power. The OG version of the manuscript presents the stories in a different order by having chapter 21 follow chapter 19. This has the effect, as Marvin Sweeney (2007, 246) suggests, of isolating the stories of the unnamed prophet in chapters 20 and 22 and grouping the Elijah stories together. Despite the disjointed nature in the flow of the Elijah stories, this narrative presents an examination of the dominant power seemingly getting its just deserts. Yet, closer examination proves this not to be the case. Elijah arrives on the scene, presumably to chastise Ahab for his acquisition of Naboth's vineyard. That the judgment that Elijah metes out to Ahab barely mentions the vineyard or even determines with a degree of certainty who possesses the vineyard should give pause to liberatory impulses (Rieger 2006; Ravela 2011). Even more discomfiting is the gradual reduction in the severity of the judgment against Ahab by the end of the chapter. What at first glance appears

to be a narrative holding up the swift and clear judgment against theft of native land seems more as a cautionary tale on how to correctly steal land.

This essay presents a postcolonial reading of this chapter, paying attention to how colonialist ideas are distorted to appear as anticolonial rhetoric. My perspective here resembles somewhat Mary Louise Pratt's (1992, 7) notion of anticonquest, where the colonizer's claim to conquest appears innocent but enforced with power. In short, my reading examines the literary context of the passage within the Deuteronomistic History, a historiography rife with the discourse of conquest. Rather than viewing this passage as a celebrated relief from this discourse of conquest, I show, through a postcolonial reading, how the passage participates and furthers this discourse. While acknowledging the redacted nature of the passage, my reading focuses on the final form of the text as it appears in the cycle of Elijah/Elisha stories. Redaction notwithstanding, the postcolonial concern shows how the issue of the land plays a secondary role to other concerns in ways that can diminish the impact of land dispossession on native peoples.

The essay builds a foundation on the exploration of anticolonial mimicry. Since the passage generates several links with historical experiences of colonialization through land deprivation, I include a narration of the history of the seventeenth-century settlement of the Virginia colony. This narration serves to both highlight history and demonstrate the central role that legality played in England's colonial endeavors. Since legal maneuvers form a core feature of this passage, the historical narration establishes the postcolonial ground for reading the passage. An examination of the colonizing ideology in the passage offers the next step in the essay, which concludes with an assessment of legality from a postcolonial perspective in the context of the work of a prophet.

### Anticolonial Mimicry

The victimization of Naboth by the monarchy stands as a clear outrage in this passage. While we are introduced to Naboth as a landowner, as the story proceeds Naboth's speech appears to present him as a native landowner fully dedicated to preserving ancestral heritages. This speech stands in sharp contrast to Ahab's, who takes a different view of land as something he can acquire for his own purposes. Walter Brueggemann (2000, 257) demonstrates care in this regard by faulting Jezebel rather than Ahab for commodifying the land. If it seems that Naboth belongs to a patrician



class in 1 Kgs 21:1, by the end of verse 3 a striking distinction in power and social location appears between Naboth and Ahab. The men may have property holdings next to each other, but they are not equals. Naboth only has his ethnic ancestry to identify him (“the Jezreelite”), while Ahab is “king” (Rofé 1988, 90). The title “king of Samaria” (1 Kgs 21:1), used for Ahab elsewhere (2 Kgs 1:3 and Assyrian royal inscriptions), occurs as the more appropriate “king of Israel” in the passage at verse 18 (Na’aman 2008, 205), thus providing evidence of the Naboth story being a later addition to the chapter (Rofé 1988, 97). Naboth comes from a city with history, and we can read this as he possesses traditions, cultures, customs, and so on. Ahab lives in the newly found capital of Samaria, which lacks any ancestral and tribal heritages (Walsh 1996, 318). By supplying quick and ample details of Ahab and Naboth, the narrative establishes proximity and juxtaposition as critical grounds on which the story unfolds. Despite this, details of space and time appear blurred at the outset.

The precise genre of the passage hardly affects its central message. Regarding the passage as a “fairytale” (Rofé 1988, 90) or “parable” (Cro-nauer 2005, 2) hardly takes away from the postcolonial concerns with this passage. Whether an actual report of history occurs here or not, the text as literature participates in representations of power as well as representations of lived histories of colonialism that produce knowledge (Said 1978, 67). Representation is a critical postcolonial concern because it has the power to reinforce belief by depicting colonialism as well as the colonized in constructed ways in order to either produce or reinforce particular beliefs (Harrison 2003, 23; Dube 2000, 83).

Bringing Ahab and Naboth together at the outset creates what Pratt (1992, 7) regards as a contact zone. In this case the contact zone occurs in the blurred space of Jezreel/Samaria, since the geographical location of the property seems to be in doubt (Nelson 1987, 138). The geographical ambiguity only arises later in the passage in the broader context of the books of Kings. At the outset, no doubt exists that Naboth and Ahab are neighbors—the vineyard sits “in Jezreel, beside [אצל] the palace of king Ahab of Samaria” (21:1). Vagueness arises during the acquisition of the land as to whether Ahab goes to possess land in Samaria or Jezreel (v. 18).

The juxtaposition and subsequent blurring of the contact zone exposes the critical postcolonial concern in this passage, that is, the passage mimics anticolonial sentiment but actually advances colonialist ambitions. The vineyard serves as the constructed contact zone in the passage. This contact zone of a vineyard in Jezreel resembles the colonial contact

zone, where colonialists attempt to establish settlement on native land. The vineyard as an economically productive space serves a beneficial purpose for Naboth and his community. This vineyard most likely operates as an economic lifeline for Jezreel and therefore is ripe for colonial acquisition. Setting up Jezreel and Samaria along with Naboth and Ahab as representative figures of their respective geographies creates opportunity for reading the colonizer/colonized binary given that the contact zone is native land.

This space of meeting appears similar to several colonial contact zones, where the opportunity, potential, creativity, adventure, excitement, and economic gains marked by the new needs to overcome the worn, tired, backward-looking, and old character of tradition. Unlike historical narratives that present colonial presence as salutary to the development of indigenous land and their people, the forceful acquisition of Naboth's vineyard presents the colonizing action in a seemingly negative light. The vineyard serves only as a pretext for a larger battle that appears to have little to do with Naboth. The blurred location of the vineyard in the later stages of the Naboth story indicates the erasure of the land as a principal concern. At the level of the narrative, the vineyard may just as well be in Samaria, since denouncing the occupants of the seat of power in Samaria stands as a more important point for the passage.

The assertion of ancestral land rights in response to a monarchical request for land places the narrative in colonial contexts marked by imperial acquisition of native land. Naboth's reply to Ahab puts his ancestral commitment at the core of his refusal to what appears to be a compelling offer (v. 3). Naboth guards his vineyard for the sake of his heritage (נחלה), an idealistic virtue for those driven by the market. Yet, Ahab is not just driven by numbers. Ahab concludes that he could put the property to better use than Naboth. Presumably, a green/vegetable garden (לגן־ירק) would be better than a vineyard (כרם). Colonialists' claims to land stand on the legal footing that natives improperly use or underutilize the land, thereby entitling them to dispossess natives of their land. Robert Williams (1990, 14) traces European justification for colonial-era conquest of native land to thirteenth-century legal arguments that granted rights to the pope to enforce civilization in non-Christian lands in order to compel behaviors (read Christian conversion) by force.

The first three verses of the chapter set the stage for an anticolonialist reading. On the surface the passage appears to invite sympathy for Naboth and outrage against Ahab. As it is evidently not a simple "no," John Gray (1970, 439) views Naboth's use of "God forbid" (לילה לי מיהוה) as evidence

that Ahab raised a profane course of action. Yet, even in these verses Ahab's actions hardly represent those of the rabid colonialist, since he asks to purchase the land within the limits of the law (Westbrook 2010, 452), but as the monarchal figure who voices interest in ancestral property, he readily represents the embodiment of historical monarchs who have easily displaced native peoples from their lands.

The extent to which different legal systems regarding land ownership operate in the passage seems more a concern at the level of the interpretation of the passage than an actual point of tension in the text (Sweeney 2007, 249; Sarna 1997, 120). Naboth's refusal may stem from his fidelity to legal traditions and theological commitments as expressed in Lev 25:23, establishing Yahweh as the owner of the land, as well as Num 27:8–11, prescribing inheritance rights over land within family ties. As Raymond Westbrook observes, monarchal land purchases already take place quite easily and without controversy, as when Omri purchases the land on which Samaria is built (1 Kgs 16:24). Therefore, he hardly thinks that two different legal systems in respect of land ownership obtains (Westbrook 2010, 442). Further, Ahab seems constrained to act as a king according to Samuel's description of the ways of a king in 1 Sam 8 as seen in Ahab's initial reluctance to go the route of forceful acquisition (Sarna 1997, 120). Naboth's refusal of the offer serves as a textual device to introduce tension in the narrative. The narrative builds around Naboth, who at the start stands sufficiently empowered to say no and possesses land, but by the end lies dead and dispossessed of his property. Without assigning reason or motive for this course of events, as readers we are expected to sympathize with Naboth. Consequently, the interpretation of the passage follows the path of justifying the outrage against the monarchy in its acquisition of this property. The broad contours of the passage easily invite a binary that evokes images of indigenous people being dispossessed of their lands.

The notes of Ahab's seemingly colonialist request reverberate throughout the passage. The repetition of Naboth's refusal on the grounds of ancestral loyalty sets what Rofé (1988, 91) sees as a battle between "traditional society against a kind of plutocracy." Naboth's refusal first appears in verse 3, then again as Ahab replays the conversation in his mind in verse 4. That Ahab leaves the detail regarding Naboth's ancestral obligations out when he relates the conversation to Jezebel in verse 6 allows ancestral traditions to be heard again through its omission. Sweeney (2007, 249) suggests that Ahab's omission of ancestry indicates that this means little to him and Jezebel, and provides evidence of their rejection of Mosaic Torah. In any

event, Ahab seems to act in the passage as a colonizer, albeit an unsuccessful colonizer.

Jezebel saves the day. She shows Ahab that the colonizing project cannot proceed by verbal requests or fair sounding appeals. Jezebel proceeds to wrap Ahab's intention with the cloak of royal power ("in Ahab's name," 21:8), embellished with legal warrant ("bring a charge," v. 10) and tied off with the bow of native collusion ("elders and nobles who lived with Naboth in his city," v. 8). Ahab fails to use the brute force given him by virtue of his office. Jezebel presses him on the power available to him with a pointed question that translates roughly as, "Are you now making king over Israel?" (אתה עתה תעשה מלוכה על-ישראל, v. 7). This brute force will not only utilize the strength of arms; since Naboth appeals to tribal law, Jezebel deploys her creative legal maneuverings to ensure that the law serves the interests of the crown to colonize and acquire whatever land it wishes.

As she writes in the name of the crown (v. 8), Jezebel resembles European monarchs who with the stroke of their pens authorized the dispossession of lands to support their colonizing intentions. These legal texts and legalized writings defined boundaries of territories, created companies to hold land possessions, incorporated territory overseas into local domains, made lords and nobles of men otherwise viewed as scoundrels, enabled killing of natives with impunity, and more. Jezebel shows quite well that the success of the colonial project depends on a willing group of locals who respect the power of the crown, who understand its superior claims, the rightness of its edicts, and its wisdom to create a better future in what would have been a decadent place. The news of the eradication of tribal obstacles paves the way for the occupation of the land.

No doubt Jezebel presents the more compelling but abhorrent picture of the successful colonizer. The events of the acquisition of the land culminate with her decisive actions and complete the anticolonial appeal of the passage. Just as location is blurred in the text, power also seems indefinitely located between Jezebel and Ahab. The inclination to tie them together as an undifferentiated source of rule remains all too real. Overlooking the way the portrait of Jezebel fills out the figure of Ahab, and therefore the monarchy, facilitates an anticolonial reading of the passage. To make Jezebel at one with the colonizing tendencies of the monarchy requires subsuming her gender and foreign status in favor of her position as queen. Yet, keeping these aspects separate and highlighting Jezebel in her own right raises the image of the foreign-born woman dispensing power in an oppressive way in another land.

While the intersections of gender, social status, and ethnicity do not always produce women who are anticolonialist or even colonialist in every way (Nzimande 2009, 243), this passage makes Jezebel the determining figure whose decisions result in land acquisition. This portrait of Jezebel serves as a diversion from those more culpable for colonial atrocities. Placing the blame on her opens the space to establish disciplinary regimes to control women (Pippin 1994, 205) as well as presenting colonized woman with the dilemma of a choice between colonial or gender oppression (Dube 2000, 112). Of course, the punishment for the actions falls to Ahab primarily, with Jezebel being included secondarily. Jezebel proves a useful distraction in this passage from a sustained focus on the land. The outsize nature of her actions builds sufficient outrage that requires an equally punitive response, thereby sustaining interest not so much on the fate of the land but on the perpetrators of the theft of the land.

Monarchal excesses that lead to deprivation of personal property present little moral ambiguity and enable this passage to fit easily into an anticolonialist frame. The imprecision of the details regarding the location of the vineyard, as well as the lack of differentiation between Jezebel and Ahab, contributes to anticolonialist sentiments in the passage. The postcolonial concern for native land requires that attention be paid to the fate of the land in the passage, especially since Naboth dies in the end. That the dispossession of the land still stands at the end of the passage renders the anticolonial aura of the passage the mask that conceals the theft of native land.

### The Legality of Colonizing

The confluence of legal actions and brute force in this passage sets it within the histories of colonial discourse regarding the conquest of the so-called New World. I narrate that history as part of my examination of this passage in order to propose the postcolonial reading of this passage. The English settlement of Virginia proves illustrative for this passage in many ways, chief among them being the involvement of Queen Elizabeth I, who, like Jezebel, presents the rare opportunity for representation of women's leadership but unfortunately provides an unflattering portrait (Nzimande 2009, 238). Walter Raleigh first proposed a vision for English settlement on the east coast of North America as a strategic means to counter the Spanish control of the hemisphere. Raleigh's close relationship with the queen granted him access to the necessary resources to make the venture possi-

ble, including being named governor of the colony. In return, he named the colony Virginia, in honor of the queen. In 1584 the queen issued Raleigh a patent "to claim, conquer, and plant colonies in America in regions not held by any other Christian prince or people" (Williams 1990, 177).

After a successful expedition with landings on Roanoke Island, Raleigh needed support to establish the venture. Richard Hakluyt argued the case for English colonization of America, deploying a series of theological and legal arguments. Hakluyt's use of earlier English legal claims is relevant for the reading of this passage. He pressed the concept of the inefficient use and underutilization of the land into service for the conquest of the West Indies and Ireland (Williams 1990, 140). With the colony established at Roanoke and chartered in early 1585, relationships with the native population deteriorated over the course of a few months, ultimately leading to several battles. Legal justification for entering into war with the native population centered on rejection of "obedience to her majesty," which in turn meant hindering the legal claim to develop underutilized lands. The battles proved too much for the English settlers, who abandoned the colony in 1587 (Williams 1990, 183).

Efforts to restart the Virginia colony took place during the reign of James I in 1606 with the grant of a royal charter for the Virginia Company. Included in the company's charter were evident religious ideals of Christian conversion and civilization. The evangelical goal provided legal cover for the colonialists to engage in war with the native population, should the animosity that occurred in the previous attempt at settlement reoccur. Edward Coke, Lord Chief Justice, provided extensive articulation of English common law in relation to rights. Coke distinguished between "friendly aliens" and "perpetual enemies" as the means to justify the imposition of English law on conquered peoples and their lands (Williams 1990, 200). Such justifications carried with them the authorization of war to entrench the king's law in the land. While courts would later step back from Coke's assertion as "the madness of the crusades," the English crown had sufficient room under the legal reasoning of Alberico Gentili's modification of the limits of the law of nations (200). Gentili accepted earlier papal legal precedent that idolatry was an adequate cause for war against non-Christian people. He also added the element of grievous crime joined to idolatry as the basis for war against non-Christians (196). These legal opinions buttressed the Virginia Company's pursuit of settlement of the colony.

The legal justifications were intended primarily to counter Spanish claims to lands in the New World and to justify envisaged antagonism

with the native population. Despite the fact that neither the Spanish nor the native population acquiesced to English legal jurisdiction, the legal scaffolding of the European colonial project from its inception suggests at once a preoccupation to prove the superiority of European civilization and a fig leaf for the unbridled greed of conquest. As Williams (1990, 205) concludes, the legal arguments notwithstanding, the rightness of the colonial project was proved not by appeals to “truths” but by power and “the right of conquest.”

As the English colony restarted with settlement at Jamestown in 1607, the question of relationships between colonists and the native population was raised. Jamestown was sited in the territory of Emperor Powhatan, who presided over a confederation of nations. Powhatan’s initial instincts to accommodate the settlers were not fully reciprocated, since the English settlers sought to construct a legal edifice for English conquest. An awkward ceremony to crown Powhatan in 1607 conveyed mixed messages. The English understood Powhatan to be submitting in fealty to the English crown, thereby acceding to the colonizers’ claim to land. Powhatan for himself viewed the ceremony as the English acceptance of his superior claims (Williams 1990, 208). Soon the competing visions served to generate antagonisms, leading to increasingly strident rhetoric of conquest among the settlers.

Robert Gray, a Puritan preacher, preached a sermon in April 1609 in sympathy with the Virginia Company’s ambitions on the God-given Christian duty to rescue lands from the “hands of beasts and brutish savages, which have no interest in it, because they participate rather of the nature of beasts than men” (Williams 1990, 210). The shift in discourse generated increased settlements in the colony, fueled in part by inducements of allowances of fifty acres to every settler. Such land grants meant further incursion into the lands of the native population and generated greater hostility. Although relative peace existed in the early years of the settlement, when Opechancanough succeeded his brother as emperor in 1618, he grew to recognize the restricted claims he had to lands even under English legal systems. Opechancanough launched a series of surprise attacks on settlements outside Jamestown in 1622, killing over a third of the colonists. The English counterattack eventually led to the capture and death of Opechancanough in 1645, followed by a signed treaty with his successor, Necotowance, ceding most of the lands to the English settlers. The treaty recognized an area known as “Indian territory” that enabled the native population to live and hunt,



but this set-aside territory was deemed a grant from the English crown (Williams 1990, 219).

This historical narrative of the establishment of the Virginia colony provides an insight into the legal discourse that fueled the colonial project. Intersecting notions of the rights of kings, scriptural and theological reasoning, and legal precedent produced conquest discourses that facilitated England's political and religious challenges to Spanish dominance. Colonial acquisition of land would always face the intractable issue of prior occupants. As Williams concludes, the English could successfully settle Virginia by constructing the native as an anomaly against "the laws of God and nature and nations." Producing systems that could effectively deal with the "perpetual infidel enemy" provided the English with the path to empire (Williams 1990, 219). The disposition of Naboth in order to acquire his land forms a core concern of the story. While Jezebel resorts to legal scaffolding to remove Naboth in the path to acquire his land, a stronger theological value appears to be at work in the narrative. This theological value that a postcolonial reading of the passage highlights, however, hardly opposes the path of the colonizer. In fact, it forms the basis on which Ahab and Jezebel can be critiqued.

### Colonizing the Right Way

The postcolonial critique of this passage focuses not so much on the assessment of the characters but rather on the construct of the narrative to promote a particular discourse. Colonialist discourse appears in the passage masked by the antagonism against this particular monarchy. The controlling interests of the passage unfold as Elijah, the central character of this cycle of stories, enters the narrative. The site of Elijah's entrance marks a place of fracture—a redactional seam where Elijah's judgment speech joins the Naboth story and a literary shift from where the consequences of the dispossession of Naboth's vineyard ought to unfold. Either as an artificial or natural fracture in the text, Elijah's entrance into the narrative occurs in the way set up by the writer/editor of the passage and therefore serves a controlling function in the passage's interpretation. The prophet's entrance exposes the broader concerns of the passage as more than the native land and therefore offers opportunity for postcolonial critique.

The vineyard functions as the location where Elijah confronts Ahab. As in the first act of the drama, where the vineyard provides the confluence of contrasting binaries, so too in the divine word to Elijah the vineyard



occupies the space where divine justice will meet colonialist greed. Elijah is expected to deliver words of judgment to Ahab in the vineyard (1 Kgs 21:18), but the judgment immediately blurs the site of justice by conflating the location of Naboth's death with Ahab's (v. 19). Since the passage never makes clear where Naboth was killed, the anticipation that restitution will occur by having Ahab meet his end in the same place proves empty. Further, that Ahab forestalls any divine wrath with acts of contrition questions whether any serious denunciation of the colonizing intent actually exists in the passage. Elijah's presence, rather than satisfying the anticolonial quest for justice, leaves it wanting.

Shifts in the narrative heighten the drama by offering brief tightly packed scenes. The initial meeting between Naboth and Ahab takes place in three verses (vv. 1–3). Ahab's emotional brooding and his dialogue with Jezebel take up about the same textual space (vv. 4–7). The intervening scene of Jezebel writing the letters (vv. 8–10) precedes the execution of her command for the disposition of Naboth and the acquisition of his property (vv. 9–14). The next shift of scene brings Elijah into the story. The presence of Elijah at this point in the narrative proves the critical turning point that exposes the fallacy of the colonial critique in the passage. Elijah enters as the supposed champion of the colonized to denounce the overreach of colonial power. However, Elijah hardly focuses on this issue. Instructed by Yahweh to speak to Ahab: "Have you killed, and also taken possession?" (v. 19), a direct charge of land acquisition through murder, Elijah instead speaks his own generic message charging Ahab with "what is evil in the sight of the LORD" (v. 20). Elijah provides no specific charge against Ahab that could accuse him of colonialist tendencies. Moreover, while he mentions a penalty for Jezebel (v. 23), this brief sentence (essentially six words in Hebrew) presents no specific misdeed. Sweeney (2007, 251), however, believes that, while Elijah does not repeat the divine message in verse 20, he expands on it with a prophetic judgment speech in verses 20b–24 and with an evaluation of the nature of the crime in verses 25–26.

Deuteronomistic redaction that joined the narrative of the land acquisition with Elijah's judgment speech may account for the blandness of the judgment and the distracted attention away from Naboth's murder to the issue of idolatry (Rofé 1988, 94). If that is the case, then the story of Naboth's murder and land dispossession holds no comparable judgment speech that calls Ahab to account. It seems more likely that a specific condemnation of Ahab for this action would have presented a more clear case against him than the present text (*contra* Na'aman 2008, 200). Proving excision of

texts is generally more difficult, given that ancient scribes would be loath to destroy written material. Most likely, existing material would be used and counterwritten if it proved unhelpful to the editorial purposes. The redacted text opens further question about the editorial intentions to use this issue as a pretext for the critique of the Omride dynasty's religious fidelity.

Theories reconstructing the growth of the Naboth story mostly assign the events of the killing of Naboth to the last stage of the tradition. Patrick Cronauer (2005, 2) suggests that 1 Kgs 21:17–29 existed as a judgment speech against Ahab for a crime against Naboth prior to its expansion with the parable of 1 Kgs 21:1–16, 23, 25ba. Alexander Rofé (1988, 96) takes a different turn by viewing 2 Kgs 9 as the earlier story focused on Ahab that was supplemented by a postexilic tradition with Jezebel as the central character as currently exists in 1 Kgs 21. As material present in the late stages of the redaction of the book of Kings, the story of a seemingly unfair land acquisition stands not for its own sake but as fodder for other considerations, such as piling negativity on Jezebel (Rofé 1988, 102) and discrediting northern monarchies for their tendency toward idolatry (Otto 2003, 493). Rofé (1988, 102) also draws attention to a possible connection between the Naboth story and a similar set of circumstances evidenced in the LXX manuscript tradition of Neh 5, where members of the community complain about their vineyards being appropriated for debt collection by “freemen.” In other words, the story of Naboth, at whatever point it develops, fits easily within the ethos of the Deuteronomistic History without disturbing its discourse of conquest.

The divine rhetorical question that should have been addressed to Ahab pairs two critical verbs—“murder” and “possess” (ירש and רצח)—and sets them off in an adverbial construction (וגם). This construction, rather than treating both actions as equal or even emphasizing the latter over the former, does the opposite by focusing attention on the murder of Naboth rather than the dispossession of his property. The concern for the shed blood of Naboth (1 Kgs 21:19) also draws attention to the murder as the more pressing concern. Without elevating the value of the land over human life, the postcolonial fixation with the land remains valid, given the interlocking relationship people have with land. In other words, Naboth and his extended family are as easily killed through dispossession of their ancestral lands as through the force of arms. A narrow concern for a landless Naboth separates him from the land in a way that overlooks the relationship with the land but also constructs him as a self-contained individual, a value that hardly exists in native cultures. The postcolonial reading

of the passage centers the land as an essential feature of life for Naboth and his family as well as a character that needs to be addressed. That the Elijah portion of the passage fails to address the land any more than as a site where more blood will be spilled reflects the slight treatment of native and indigenous concerns.

To read this chapter as anticolonialist would require reading against the fabric of the Deuteronomistic History. Although the conquest narratives are largely contained in the book of Joshua, the issues of control of land persist throughout the Deuteronomistic History in ways that link narratives in Judges, Samuel, and Kings with Josh 6–11 (Hamiel and Rösel 2012, 217). Richard Nelson (1987, 141) views the use of “possess” (ירש) in 1 Kgs 21:15 as Deuteronomistic code for conquest. The verb ירש appears seventy-one times in the book of Deuteronomy, and, of the six times that it shows up in 1 Kings, all except one instance occur in chapter 21. Should the logic of Deuteronomy hold, then Ahab merely follows the pattern set out in the conquest of the land.

Yet, to be sure, Ahab and Jezebel cannot serve as strong exemplars of the Deuteronomistic tradition, hence their negative characterizations. The negativity lies, though, not in their colonizing actions but rather in their murderous actions. The injunctions to possess in Deuteronomy do not include the destruction of native landowners. In the event that native landowners need to be driven from the land, in almost every instance Yahweh performs this work. Ahab’s fault lies not so much in his colonizing ambitions but in being led astray by an overzealous Jezebel in the use of power that exposes the thinness of the legal construct surrounding territorial expansion.

An evaluation of Ahab and Jezebel’s version of conquest in light of Deuteronomic ideals shows their failure to properly attend to the native question. A robust legal edifice needs to cover the use of force to prevent either dispossession of the land or the elimination of native populations when required from appearing as abhorrent. In every case in Deuteronomy, the Israelites are only commanded to take possession of the land given to them. In the event that hostilities occur, Yahweh performs the necessary tasks to empty the land of its inhabitants to facilitate its occupation. The subduing of Sihon (Deut 2:24), a list of nations conquered by Yahweh left for the Israelites to destroy (Deut 7:1–2), and the reminiscences of the Egyptian plagues as a reminder that the divine warrior will fight against seemingly more powerful nations (Deut 7:17–22) illustrate this paradigm. Deuteronomy trades on notions of the empty and emptied land to present

territorial acquisition as a simple function requiring obedience to divine commands. In the cases where native peoples still remain on the land, appeals to their egregious idolatry and misuse of the land serve as sufficient justification for their eradication either at the hands of the divine warrior or the Israelites. The impression of directly destroying indigenous population given in Deut 2:12 by comparing the case of Edom's destruction of the Horim with similar actions by Israel is quickly corrected in Deut 2:21–22 by making Yahweh the agent of destruction. The one exception to directly destroying a population seems to be the case of the odious Amalek: the Israelites are commanded to “annihilate” (מַשְׁחָה) Amalek even after they have already occupied the land (Deut 25:19). Deuteronomy offers a template for dealing with native populations in the process of conquest. While Ahab and Jezebel try to approximate the legal tissues that cover the act of conquest, they insufficiently perform this function.

First Kings 21 masks its colonizing tendencies by critiquing the excesses of Ahab and Jezebel, excesses that distort an otherwise acceptable colonizing path. The narrative therefore splits along the lines of the good sort of colonialism represented by the sulking Ahab and the bad variety portrayed by the evil scheming of Jezebel. By offering no critique of Ahab's colonizing intentions but instead focusing on how Jezebel misleads him, the issue of the dispossession of the vineyard falls off the radar. In fact, as Elijah deals with the case, the fate of the vineyard remains in doubt. What restoration is there for Naboth's family and the ancestral claims to the property? Who has rights to the property? The next mention of Naboth's vineyard occurs in 2 Kgs 9, during the reign of Ahab's son Joram. Elijah's judgment against Ahab and Jezebel remains suspended both in the immediate time of his speech and in the overall narrative of the Deuteronomistic History until the revolt against the Omrides by Jehu. That is to say, as Elijah speaks, he indicates no immediate repercussions for either Ahab or Jezebel (1 Kgs 21:21–24). The lack of an instantaneous judgment appears striking, given the character of Elijah, who is presented as a wonder-worker in the books of Kings.

The extension of Naboth's story over several chapters makes the saga more interesting, with seemingly contradictory plot turns. First, it presents a strong denunciation of Ahab, not for his actions regarding the vineyard but for being led astray by his wife and his worship of idols (vv. 25–26). By using *הַגִּלְלִים*, an intentionally polemical choice of word for “idols,” strengthened through linguistic links with Manasseh's crimes and the association with the Amorites (1 Kgs 21:26), the broadside against Ahab

as the quintessential northern king takes place (Schniedewind 1993, 655). Second, following Elijah's forceful statement, which should serve as the ground for more explosive action against Ahab, the plot switches to Ahab's contrition for his actions, though whether this relates to his land acquisition or his idolatry remains ambiguous in the text.

The idea that the prophetic sections of the book of Kings constitute an apology for the Nimshide dynasty in their struggle against the Ormides illustrates the secondary nature of the critical concern about native lands (Halpern and Lemaire 2010, 137; Na'aman 2008, 206; Sweeney 2007, 247). The haziness stands as sufficient cause to amplify the point that the episode relating to land grabbing in the manner of Ahab finds agreement in the larger purposes of the Deuteronomistic History. Essentially, it would appear that Ahab finds a measure of forgiveness in the narrative through separation from Jezebel, a separation that results in her "transparent" survival until 841 BCE and ultimate scapegoating as the colonial villain (Halpern and Lemaire 2010, 145). Through several other means the Deuteronomistic History presents Ahab as a likable character when separated from Jezebel. His death in battle to recover Ramoth-Gilead, a Levitical city as well as a city of refuge, in a joint campaign with King Jehoshaphat of Judah grants him a noble death (1 Kgs 22:35–37). The note of 1 Kgs 22:38, inserted to confirm Elijah in 1 Kgs 21:23–24 in an imperfect manner, notwithstanding, Ahab goes on to have his sons rule in his place. Ahaziah succeeds him but sustains injuries in a fall and, despite several pleas to Elijah for healing, dies. Remarkably, for this narrative, Ahaziah dies peacefully, without the dishonorable events predicted for Ahab and his sons (2 Kgs 1:17–18). William Schniedewind (1993, 657) notes that redaction does not so much redeem Ahab as shift the charge from being led astray by Jeroboam with idols to following his foreign wife in the worship of foreign deities.

The distance between the initial episode of the dispossession of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kgs 21 and its further mention in 2 Kgs 9 provides further evidence of how the legal framework dominates the colonial enterprise. This narrative distance—where several different events intrude in addition to the distance in time indicated in the narrative (Elijah has given way to Elisha, and Ahab's second son Joram is on the throne)—suggests the episode in 2 Kgs 9:21–26 as a separate story from 1 Kgs 21 and as necessitated by Elijah's judgment.

New characters in 2 Kgs 9 must be situated within the previous narrative and the struggles of Ahab and Elijah. The uprising led by Jehu provides

the setting for the execution of the judgment against the house of Ahab as well as an updated judgment issued through Elisha (2 Kgs 9:8–10). Interestingly, the climatic event occurs at the property of Naboth, not called “vineyard” as in 1 Kgs 21 but “property” (בְּחִלְקָתוֹ, 2 Kgs 9:21). Further, it seems that Ahab’s son Joram exercises rights over the property (2 Kgs 9:21) and will die in that land, seemingly avenging the death of Naboth and his sons (2 Kgs 9:26a). Elijah’s judgment occurs with Joram bearing the punishment decreed to his father, and Jezebel is ultimately killed in the dishonorable way that Elijah indicated (2 Kgs 9:30–37).

Despite all of this, no account is given of the fate of the property, an indication of its secondary nature in the narrative. That Joram is killed and then unceremoniously dumped on the land described as “the plot of ground belonging to Naboth” (2 Kgs 9:25) only proves that colonized lands may serve as the graveyards of colonizers, but they are still colonized. The fates of Ahab and his family do little to focus attention on the fate of the land or to shed light on the fact that native land can be appropriated through legal means or methods acceptable to a dominant culture. Punishing overreach masks the legalized theft that takes place at the hand of entrenched power.

### Legalism and Colonialism

Law served to dignify the European colonial project (Rieger 2006, 61). The preoccupation to sift actions through the legal sieve in no way denied the use of coercive power to conquer lands. Uncovering the legal scaffold constructed around colonialism reveals the will to power in its raw state. Legality served as the perfect shield for these actions, since there was no authority higher than the courts, which gained their legitimacy through divine and civic right. The postcolonial critique offers the best opportunity through revisionist historiography to indict these decisions. The prophet Elijah’s role in this passage falls short of the expected counterbalance to power. However, the needed critique of power in this passage comes from the words of Yahweh in 1 Kgs 21:19. This critique draws the curtain back on the injustice of the laws as applied in the story.

This passage shows how the law facilitates the conquest of land through legal use of coercive power “in a benign and invisible way” (Brueggemann 2000, 259). In every way Ahab acts as constrained by the law in his request to Naboth. He offers what seems to be a fair deal to Naboth by not simply displacing him to inferior territory but also by an agreement to resettle him

to a better vineyard. Noticeably, expropriation is not Ahab's first inclination to acquire the land. His sullen mood after being turned down would indicate little to no interest in that mechanism. As Jezebel goads him to use his power, she does not go the way of expropriating the land. Instead, she employs a series of legal means deemed "punctilious" by Gray (1970, 441), in order to remove Naboth as the rightful owner of the land to pave the way for the Crown's acquisition of the property. Evidently Jezebel follows a legal course to dispossess Naboth of his land that ends in his death by legal means.

Jezebel's legal reasoning does not appear in the passage. However, medieval Jewish exegetes think that some legal recourse existed for her to believe that dispatching Naboth through a combination of social shame and execution would make the land available to the crown (Sarna 1997, 123). The practice of forfeiture of lands in the ancient Near East for disloyalty to the king notwithstanding (Westbrook 2010, 455), her actions lend a measure of believability to what Sarna (1997, 123) calls "the fictional impression of legality." Jezebel's actions need not be confirmed by their consistency with biblical legal texts to make the point that legality functions as the instrument for facilitating the transfer of land that would otherwise be seen as theft.

The divine assessment of the killing of Naboth as murder blows the cover on the legal claims in the passage. This assessment indicts the processes of land acquisition as nothing more than legalized theft. The presence of a higher authority with greater insight exposes the unscrupulous nature of the use of law to buttress conquest. The presumption of a good colonialism proves to be a fallacy, as legal systems merely grant immunity to the powerful to act with impunity in order to acquire the land of the weaker group, such as the case of the Dalits in India (Ravela 2011, 133). Ultimately, the land falls off the radar in the story and presumably remains in the hands of the crown. If a salutary moment exists in the passage, it occurs in the divine voice intruding into the narrative to disturb the colonial discourse. The disturbance comes not only to monarchical powers but also to the logic deployed in the shaping of the narrative in the book of Kings that dispossession of native land can be either excused or overlooked (Brueggemann 2000, 264).

## Conclusion

Fictional stories such as that of Naboth reflect lived histories in many ways and rely on lived histories for their interpretation and relevance. The



evident unfairness pushes the reader to take sides immediately. Biblical texts are more complex than the simple binaries that appear on their surfaces, given their historical growth and varied reception. A postcolonial reading centers the text in diverse settings to examine how the text functions as a critique of geopolitical power. The Naboth story fits with the history of European conquest of the New World. European colonial conquest operated on the notion that better use could be made of the land. European colonialism found various ways to facilitate the displacement of native populations from their lands under the guise of development. The legal edifice of colonialism proved successful, and despite the verdict of history, an entirely new world was created through the conquest of native land. For Naboth and his descendants, no recourse or corrective occurs in the passage, which seems to stand on his side only to use his case for other purposes. The postcolonial reading of this passage calls attention to the way colonialist discourse can appear innocent by constructing distracting figures, directing outrage to the wrong target or even parsing the moral limits of dispossession. In the end, native land as a central character in the history of conquest asks for its justice, and the postcolonial task seeks to attend to this cry.

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## Reading 1 Kings 21 *en Conjunto*: The Subjectivity of *lo Cotidiano*

Timothy J. Sandoval

Through a consideration of the contributions of two important (though broadly conceived) strands of contemporary biblical interpretation—the postcritical and the postmodern—and via reflections on a church-based Bible study in a Hispanic-Latinx context, this essay suggests ways Latinx biblical studies has contributed and can continue to contribute to larger discussions on biblical hermeneutics and interpretation. In particular, it suggests how a “more than liberal” Latinx subjectivity might theoretically ground a critical, though not exclusively *historical*-critical, biblical studies.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Latinx theology in the Christian academy has been the call to, and practice of, doing theology, ethics, and biblical interpretation *en conjunto*—together, “with each other,” in community (Rodríguez and Martell-Otero 1997). Similarly, Latinx people in the theological academy, perhaps most notably the late *mujerista* thinker Ada María Isasi-Díaz (1996; 2003; 2004), have considered *lo cotidiano*—the context of everyday experience—as an important frame of reference in which to do theology and biblical interpretation. These two orientations—reading the Bible *en conjunto* and in the context of *lo cotidiano*—frame my reflections on reading 1 Kgs 21. More fundamentally, however, these comments are suggestions about Latinx biblical interpretation more broadly speaking and not merely reflections on the story of Naboth’s murder.

As other minoritized interpreters in the Christian theological academy surely also know, when constructive categories such as *lo cotidiano* and *en conjunto*, which emerge from minoritized persons’ experiences, are foregrounded in the work of interpretation, they are sometimes perceived as mere cultural window dressing, and the interpreters and interpretations

easily exoticized and marginalized as something other than real biblical studies. *En conjunto* and *lo cotidiano*, however, should not be imagined—as I fear they sometimes are—primarily in terms of stereotypical cultural identity images of Latinx people celebrating fiestas or bustling around large and lively family gatherings.

What is more, the development of analytical categories such as *en conjunto* and *lo cotidiano* should not be understood as merely a way that Latinx or Hispanic theologians and biblical scholars have sought to carve out a rhetorical space for themselves and their concerns in the academy. Such work, of course, has in part been an effort to insist on an identity and a hearing in the scholarly guilds. Although in this effort scholars have sometimes appealed implicitly or explicitly—and, to some, problematically—to modern, essentialist notions of culture and identity, especially in more recent decades Latinx biblical and theological hermeneutics, together with other minoritized hermeneutical voices, have carried out projects with other sorts of theoretical understandings of culture and identity (Valentin 2002; Liew 2008; Segovia 2009; Rivera Rivera 2009).

Cultural images such as fiesta and family, of course, can be constructive for our work when sufficiently theorized and regarded as reflecting important experiences that help to shape aspects of the subjectivities of many Latinx people. Sandra Cisneros's (2002) *Caramelo or, Puro Cuento: A Novel*, for example, represents a fictional Mexican American family in such a way that a rich and complex view of identity emerges (see Valentin 2002). Yet at least equally significant in this shaping of Latinx subjectivities are the realities of struggle by, within, and between individual Latinx people and different Hispanic communities, and between Hispanics and others. Indeed, being in, and staying in, *la lucha* is a further critical trope that Latinx or Hispanic scholars have developed (Isasi-Díaz 2003; 2004). These struggles take a myriad of forms—whether between generations and genders, around sexuality, or on issues of migration, discrimination, and economic advancement. When it is recognized that Latinx biblical interpretation is also done “together” (*en conjunto*) in the context of *these* sorts of everyday realities (*lo cotidiano*), which serve fundamentally to shape the subjectivities of many Latinx people, a fundamental contribution to discussions of biblical interpretation by Latinx biblical hermeneutics can be foregrounded.

However, this contribution is not simply the production of different readings by different minoritized, Latinx, or Hispanic individuals

or communities in different contexts—although such work is vitally important. The broader contribution rather is a fundamental claim to place in biblical studies. The claim, in my view, is not to re-place entirely the mode of biblical interpretation dominant in academic biblical studies, but to dis-place it, or to decenter it—to get it to *hacerse más allá*, to move over, a bit more. As such, it is a claim about what funds the diversity of interpretations—something that is inevitable even within clearly defined communities of readers, including historical-critical, academic readers—offered by Latinx or Hispanic Bible readers. Similar to African American and other Africana hermeneutic projects (Felder 1991; Blount 1995; Brown 2004; Floyd-Thomas 2006; Callahan 2006; Page 2009; Wim-bush 2012), Latinx biblical interpretation is a claim about different subjectivities that are prerequisite for engaging in different types of critical biblical studies.

### The Subject of the Problem and the Problem of the Subject

To paraphrase legal scholar Pierre Schlag, it sometimes seems to me that there is only one story in contemporary academic study of the Bible and only one problem. The story is the story of the rise and dominance of the historical-critical paradigm, along with some important (fairly recent), but only moderately successful, challenging of that paradigm. The problem is the problem of the subject. An important characteristic of the story of biblical studies is that it only rarely—and hardly ever fully—deals with the problem of the subject. The problem of the subject is that it has hardly ever been sufficiently a part of the story (Schlag 1991).

A particular, post-Enlightenment—what I call liberal—subjectivity was necessary for the emergence of the modernist historical-critical project in biblical studies. *Subjectivity*, of course, is a complex and much-debated term. Robert Solomon (2005, 857) thinks of subjectivity as that which pertains “to the subject and his or her particular perspective, feelings, beliefs, and desires.” The notion “plays various and sometimes ambiguous roles in epistemology, in contemporary Continental philosophy, and in cognitive science.” Thinkers of various stripes have sought “to argue from this admittedly limited standpoint” to knowledge. This approach still largely characterizes professional study of the Bible, whether theologically liberal or conservative. Postliberal thinker Hans Frei (1974) implicitly suggested this years ago, at roughly the same historical moment when minoritized voices were also making themselves formally heard in the academy.

Yvonne Sherwood (2012), from a different starting point and long after minoritized voices had formally entered the hermeneutic conversation, has more recently intimated the same notion in her work on the “Liberal Bible.” These two deeply Eurocentric thinkers formulate critiques of the liberal subjectivity on which modern biblical studies is based and in the midst of which Latinx biblical interpretation finds itself. Their work can thus serve as a foil by which to (re)state and map (afresh) contributions of Latinx biblical criticism (and perhaps minoritized biblical criticism more generally) to the larger enterprise of biblical interpretation.

I use terms such as *(re)state* and *map (afresh)* since much of what I say via reflections on two important strands of contemporary biblical interpretation (which I call, somewhat inadequately, *postcritical* and *postmodern*) has been articulated by others, in other ways, in other contexts.

### Frei and the Postliberals

In his seminal work *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, Frei sought to sketch broad hermeneutical trends in early modern Europe and their implications for biblical interpretation—then and into the future. His work, though regularly lauded, has also been (as all seminal works are) the object of some critique. For example, given the range of different types of texts one finds in the Bible, his focus on biblical narrative is sometimes viewed as too limited to support some of his broader claims about hermeneutics; or it is suggested the hermeneutic implications of his work do not sufficiently account for modern historical consciousness (see Thiselton 1992, 485–86; Poland 1985, 120–37). Here, however, I am not concerned to defend or critique Frei’s work much more than others already have. Rather, I point to an important element of his project that can be helpful for imaging the ways Latinx biblical criticism can engage ongoing questions in, and the practice of, biblical interpretation.

Despite not being primarily interested in recounting the emergence of historical criticism, Frei (1974, 9) did in fact identify how the rise of the historical-critical method in early modern Europe was predicated on the emergence of a post-Enlightenment, liberal subject (though he does not use this exact terminology). Indeed, in *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, although it is not his precise concern to do so, one can discern how Frei chronicles the biblical criticism offered by a range of scholars who in some fashion are liberal subjects—the self-conscious, sovereign, rational individuals (from Spinoza to Strauss) who go to work on the Bible and via a

largely positivistic, critical orientation can locate singular meaning in the historical reference (and context) of a text.<sup>1</sup> As Frei contends, the emergence of the historical-critical method (and liberal subjectivity) marked a significant change from what he calls precritical interpretation.

For Frei, in pre-eighteenth-century Europe the Bible's narratives were understood in a literal-historical way: readers' focus was on the literal sense of the biblical stories, which—because of their narrative, realistic, history-like shape—were unproblematically regarded as reflecting true history. Emphasis was *not* on questions of historicity or questions of whether something really happened, and happened the way the Bible says it happened—the sorts of questions that became so important for a post-Enlightenment liberal subjectivity. Through historical-critical study of the Bible, liberal subjects elevated positivistic historical perspectives and constrained the concept of truth to historical truth and meaning to (historical) reference. For Frei (1974, 9), “In the course of the eighteenth century” the narrative character of the biblical stories “came to signify not so much a literary depiction ... but rather the single meaning of a grammatically and logically sound propositional statement.”

According to Frei, the meaning and truth of the Bible were not so historically constrained for precritical or premodern (i.e., preliberal) Europeans. The shape of the biblical story rather represented the one and only real world and so was able to embrace the experience of any present age or interpreter. Thus, it was possible and even necessary to fit one's own story, or the story of one's own community, into the story of the Bible. Typological and allegorical methods of interpretation served this end. As Frei (1974, 3) writes, it was possible for an interpreter “to fit himself into” the biblical world, and the interpreter “did so in part by figural interpretation and in part of course by his mode of life. He was to see his disposition, his actions and passions, the shape of his own life as well as that of his era's events as figures of that [the Bible's] storied world.”

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1. I say “in some fashion” and “largely” because all of the figures Frei treats are complex thinkers who engaged the intellectual traditions of their days in complicated ways. Some, of course, are regularly identified with intellectual movements that in part rejected aspects of Enlightenment rationalism (e.g., Romanticism). Nonetheless, most can be described as liberal in the kind of intellectual stance they take up toward the Bible, even if none of them can be viewed as straw figures or caricatures of a liberal subjectivity.

In post-Enlightenment, early modern Europe, by contrast, liberal subjects retreated from this precritical interpretive orientation and sought ways of making the Bible fit their world. As Frei (1974, 5–6) explains, “the direction of interpretation now became the reverse of earlier days.” Biblical stories needed to be incorporated “into an independent sense of a world of experience and of rational interpretation.” The meaning of biblical texts was now “referable to an external more general context, and the story now has to be interpreted into it, rather than that eternal pattern of meaning being incorporated—figurally or in some other way—into the story.” The realistic character of biblical texts came to be regarded—or misunderstood—not merely as history-like, but as referring to real events that historically minded critics could reconstruct, and the historicity (and “factual truth”) of which could be questioned. For Frei, “The depicted biblical world and the real historical world began to be separated at once in thought and in sensibility, no matter whether the depiction was thought to agree with reality ... or disagree with it.”

This reversal of the interpretive process occurred even as some liberal, historical-critical scholarly subjects, whether theologically conservative or liberal, recognized a significant hermeneutical problem: that the historical meanings they were expounding from the biblical texts were not particularly helpful in a religious sense to other subjects in post-Enlightenment Europe (Frei 1974, 9). More theologically liberal scholars conceded that aspects of the biblical story could not be historically true or accurate by the emerging rationalist criteria. They thus regularly attempted to find behind the Bible’s historical meaning something more universally and rationalistically palatable for emerging modern sensibilities. Some conservative scholars, by contrast, took up the daunting task of demonstrating how the Bible was in fact historically true in the new, modern critical sense of historical truth: that things really happened the way the Bible says they happened.<sup>2</sup>

In both cases, interpreters sought to make the Bible fit their modern world, rather than assimilate their realities to the real story of the Bible. Indeed, Frei makes much of the irony that, although nearly all interpreters

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2. See John Rogerson’s (1984) discussion of nineteenth-century German scholarship, which sketches Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette’s relationship to Kantian philosophy (in particular that of Jakob Friedrich Fries) and Wilhelm Vatke’s Hegelianism, while also noting the orthodox conservative reaction this provoked in the work of, among others, Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg.



recognized the history-like character of the biblical narratives, none developed an adequate hermeneutic to understand it. As Frei (1974, 12) writes, “the confusion of history-likeness (literal meaning) and history (ostensive reference), and the hermeneutical reduction of the former to an aspect of the latter, meant that one lacked the distinctive category and the appropriate interpretive procedure for understanding what one had actually recognized: the high significance of the literal, narrative shape of the stories for their meaning.”

The effects of the sea change in biblical interpretation marked by the rise of a liberal subjectivity, which, as Frei suggests, both theological conservatives and liberals in earlier centuries struggled to come to terms with, are still being worked out in biblical interpretation. As Frei (1974, 17–18) explains, “Biblical interpretation since the eighteenth century has always proceeded in two directions which sometimes have appeared to be on a collision course. On the one hand there has been the question of the origin and, in some respects, the reliability of biblical writings”—the historical-critical project of liberal subjects. “On the other, there has been inquiry into the proper ways of learning what abiding meaning or value these writings might have.” Frei’s words from a generation ago remain apt: “Disentangling and relating hermeneutics and historical criticism was no easy matter then or now.”<sup>3</sup>

One effort at such disentangling and relating that builds on postliberal and narrative theological thinking, which itself is intimately related to Frei’s work, is sometimes called postcritical biblical interpretation. Such biblical criticism looks to a (usually Christian) community as the place where an alternative, postliberal subjectivity—at least one not overly concerned with history—might read the Bible (see Sherwood 2012; Newsom 2009). An important contribution of this form of interpretation builds on Frei’s understanding of precritical interpretation. An interpreter and the interpreter’s Christian community ought to understand their own realities

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3. Krister Stendahl (1962), earlier than Frei, had claimed that the history-of-religions school solidified the sort of distinctions Frei articulates. Stendahl for his part famously spoke of the need for a two-stage hermeneutical process in interpreting the Bible—a move from a historical descriptive account of “what it meant” to the dogmatic, constructive account of “what it means.” For Sherwood (2012) such a move would likely be an example of how liberal, critical biblical interpretation performs, constructs, and reinforces the Liberal Bible as a symbolic support for all things (good and) liberal. See below.

or story as part of the biblical story and not obsess over historical concerns or singular meanings that derive from those historical concerns, since for some communities of faith (as in the centuries past that Frei spoke of) such a historical focus has proven inadequate, theologically speaking.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, many have viewed the problematizing of the liberal subject and the attempt to get beyond historical-critical concerns to arrive at meaningful theological interpretation of the Bible, for and by a community of faith, as a positive development. However, some view the project as unjustifiably subjective and self-referential, since conflicts of interpretation are necessarily mediated by the community of faith, the postcritical interpretive community. Such communities, it is thought, will find in the biblical texts only support for views and perspectives already held. They will be unable to be challenged by the text or the interpretations of other readers. Such a criticism is sometimes leveled at forms of minoritized biblical criticism as well. What is more, despite the good intentions of freeing the Bible from singular historical meanings in the service of theological appropriation, the postcritical interpretive community, the arbiter of meaning, can sometimes appear as nothing other than a projection of a liberal subject that produces its own singular, authoritative interpretations.<sup>5</sup> Although postcritical communities may escape some of the demands of historical-critical interpretation, the multiplicity of readings that emerge, for example, from nondominant voices and social locations that might engage or challenge postcritical voices are easily, even if unintentionally, passed over.

Cornel West, for one, has suspected that, although Frei's work (which, again, has deeply influenced postcritical approaches) offers a profound

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4. In his work on Latinx biblical interpretation, Justo González (1996, 23) relates an experience that illustrates precisely the sort of problem that postcritical biblical interpretation also seeks to address: the inadequacy of the liberal, critical theological and biblical studies he learned in seminary for his theological and pastoral work in Cuba. The once quite popular book, especially within more conservative Christian circles, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* by Helmut Thielicke (1962), which cautions young pastors not to drop all their critical learning on their congregations at once, it seems to me, points to the same sort of situation that González describes, only in a European parish context.

5. An emphasis on the significance of interpretive communities in interpretation is not, of course, limited to postcritical biblical studies. Such notions were introduced to mainstream biblical studies largely, though not exclusively, via the work of Stanley Fish (1980) in literary studies. See also the critique of Fish and other "pragmatic" hermeneutic approaches, including forms of minoritized criticism, by Thiselton (1992).

theological intervention into contemporary theory, it remains deeply ambivalent about the inevitability of multiple interpretations of texts. West (1983, 301) writes, “Frei’s nostalgia for figural interpretation—though he is too sophisticated to call for a return to pre-critical hermeneutics—reveals his dismay regarding radical indeterminacy.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, “Despite Frei’s powerful critiques of the major developments of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century hermeneutics, he remains closer to the aims of these [liberal] developments than to those of contemporary interpretation theory” (301–2). From the side of narrative theology and ethics, Gloria Albrecht (1995) and others have suggested that the emphasis that one finds in postliberal/postcritical thought on an individual’s character ought to be supplemented by an equal concern to interrogate the character of the postliberal community itself, which exercises so much normative interpretive power. Although not naming specifically postcritical interpretive communities, biblical scholar Cheryl Anderson (2009, 31–32) likewise suspects that most “who have traditionally interpreted the Bible for the Church” turn out to look a lot like Audre Lorde’s “mythical norm,” which is white, male, heterosexual, and Euro-American—in other words, that same liberal subject of historical-critical biblical studies who is a fully self-conscious, sovereign, rational, historically minded individual.<sup>7</sup>

Though West, Albrecht, Anderson, and others have insightfully critiqued Frei’s work—which is of course considerably more complex and erudite than the necessarily brief sketch above might suggest—Frei’s many insights regarding the hermeneutic rift that arose between premodern European biblical interpretation and post-Enlightenment historical criticism are useful for considering the manner in which Latinx biblical hermeneutics might engage contemporary biblical criticism. The disconnect between hermeneutics and historical criticism that Frei describes still largely characterizes biblical studies. As I will suggest below, Latinx bibli-

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6. West (1983, 301) continues: “Figural interpretations provide precisely what hermeneutics of radical indeterminacy preclude: totalizing frameworks, unified texts, homogenous readings, chronological continuities and recuperative strategies. In contrast to these aims, contemporary interpretation theory promotes anti-totalizing approaches, dissemination of textual meanings, heterogeneous readings, anti-teleological discontinuities and deconstructive efforts.”

7. Carol A. Newsom (2009) likewise recognizes some of these difficulties in post-critical biblical interpretation and, not unlike what I suggest below, intimates that such interpretation ought always to stand in dialogue with ideological criticism of the Bible.

cal hermeneutics (and other minoritized biblical hermeneutic endeavors) can offer a way to negotiate a passage through or around this rift.

### Sherwood and the “Postmoderns”<sup>8</sup>

In her book *Biblical Blaspheming: Trials of the Sacred for a Secular Age*, Sherwood suggests that in the modern West a certain set of interpretive practices comes to constitute what she calls the Liberal Bible, the sacred symbolic source of all things (good and) liberal: reason, law, democracy, and so forth. Hence even in ostensibly secular contexts, the (Liberal) Bible can be fiercely defended against detractors (Sherwood 2012, 9–97). As Sherwood sees it, however, certain aspects of the Bible simply refuse to be accommodated by or assimilated into the liberal: for example, the often ferocious words of the prophets, which in pointing to a violent and dangerous deity (or sacred realm) transcend any notion of rhetoric as the art of eloquent persuasion; or Gen 22’s account of a person sacrificing his child at the command of a deity. The mythology of the Bible as the benign source of all things good and liberal is thus undermined, and the Liberal Bible can be seen for what it really is: a fragile cultural symbol that can come undone simply by reading the actual Bible. The Bible is thus a wobbly beam in the project of propping up Western liberalism—these days (as Sherwood [2012, 333–74] argues) regularly at the expense of a constructed, externalized, Muslim other.

Of course, liberal biblical scholars (i.e., scholars trained in historical-critical biblical studies and not merely theologically liberal scholars) have long delighted in getting their students to just read the actual Bible and thereby see that it is not always the Bible of their basic religious education or the popular imagination. Bible professors can thus demonstrate to students—or better yet, have students discover for themselves—that certain, sometimes dearly held views about the Bible simply cannot be sustained. But Sherwood is doing much more than playing your typical Bible prof in your typical Intro to Bible class.

Her analysis reveals more fundamentally how professional biblical interpreters who critique the often wild, unruly, violent, and decidedly

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8. The following observations of Sherwood’s work are in large part drawn from Sandoval 2015. I use *postmoderns* here somewhat loosely and in a broad sense to signal Sherwood’s (and others’) familiarity and engagement with a range of critical theories or just “Theory” (Moore and Sherwood 2011, 2–43).

illiberal biblical text end up (almost) invariably translating the Bible—the prophets and the Akedah in any case—back into an acceptable liberal idiom (as did so many of those interpreters whom Frei surveys). The prophets thus become primarily the font of a liberal tradition of social justice, rather than, say, the source of a scatological discourse of “death, entropy, disease, nakedness, rape, and waste” (Sherwood 2012, 171). Similarly, the Akedah teaches us about “giving your all for God” rather than being about murder in the name of religion (333–74). Biblical scholars thus perform and reinforce the Bible’s place as a key sacred symbol of liberalism and Western society. They (re)create the Liberal Bible.

Sherwood’s work also shows (somewhat indirectly) the ultimate instability of the liberal subject that was (and is) necessary for the practice of professional criticism of the Bible as it has been, and usually continues to be, undertaken, namely, in a historical-critical vein. Sherwood (2012, 368) also helpfully reveals what she views as a typical modern binary invoked (at least implicitly) by much liberal, professional criticism—where the modern is quintessentially associated with reason and “the rise of critique,” while the premodern remains mired in the “thrall of ‘religion.’” Sherwood, of course, is hardly the first to suggest that the critical/precritical binary is a self-serving invention of moderns. Nor is she the first to show how premodern readers of the Bible (e.g., the rabbis) were, despite their premodern historical context, imminently critical—something that biblical scholars more and more have been recognizing. Yet, through all this Sherwood does powerfully reveal how the modern critic, if she is going to be a real (that is, an institutionally acknowledged) critic, is forced into “taking up a position as a subject before a religious object” (371) and by virtue of this must leave behind a position of faith in a way that premodern (or nonliberal) religious (and critical) subjects were not required to. This is in essence a helpful theoretical formulation of the insight one of my beloved teachers, John H. Hayes, may he rest in peace, used to playfully but perceptively relate when he spoke of so many biblical scholars “travelin’ down the Damascus Road ... in reverse!”

Sherwood’s making problematic the scholarly liberal subject is important for thinking about what academic biblical studies—including Latinx biblical interpretation—might become in the future. Indeed, *Biblical Blaspheming* in its entirety quite brilliantly yearns to move beyond (and in fact does move beyond) a biblical criticism that has been so determined (over-determined, Sherwood might say) by a liberal subjectivity that produced as its only legitimate mode of critique the historical criticism that has so

dominated professional biblical studies in modernity and which compels interpreters to disavow a religious (usually communal) subject position.

Although Sherwood does not make the point explicitly, ironically it is precisely such religious identity and communal commitments that for many (if not most) biblical critics largely motivated their concern with the Bible in the first place. That is, I suspect few come to biblical studies without the mediation of a community of faith (though, of course, some do), and I suspect even fewer minoritized, especially Latinx, biblical scholars do so. Whatever the case, by critiquing liberal criticism and the subjectivity it derives from, Sherwood wants to pass into a new kind of biblical studies—one that can more deftly, more regularly, more deeply look at religion, culture, ethics, the history of reception, as well as the political effects of the Bible and biblical interpretation, rather than primarily concern itself with questions of origins, authors, editors, and historical developments.

This call to move beyond historical criticism and the liberal, Enlightenment subjectivity on which it is founded is, of course, hardly a new exhortation in biblical studies, though it is one that is rarely issued with the academic vigor of Sherwood's account. Indeed, from different starting points, analogous calls and critiques have been raised not only by proponents of postcritical interpretation mentioned above but also for decades by minoritized voices in the theological academy. This is so even if (as mentioned above) the critique was sometimes articulated through what some would now consider problematic conceptions of identity and culture. In fact, for Sherwood it is precisely those who have experienced significant "pain at victimization by the Bible" and whom she believes inhabit "culturally valorized subject positions" (94–95)—read Black, womanist, Latinx, queer, and so forth—who alone are entitled to critique the Bible in a contemporary liberal context. Sherwood wants to move beyond this state of affairs and level a critique (or offer a "blaspheming") of the Bible in the name of what she describes as an "infinitesimally small (and unprotected)" subject—the "single I" and "no particular subject group"(95).<sup>9</sup>

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9. Sherwood calls her work of critique "blaspheming" because, as noted, she believes that in modernity only those who have a sort of officially sanctioned gripe against the Bible can legitimately critique it. All others must show proper deference and respect. Hence to critique the Bible from outside one of Sherwood's (2012, 95) "culturally valorized subject positions" (say, as a white, European academic) is the height of blasphemy. In addition, if "to valorize" means "give or ascribe value or validity to," as the *Oxford English Dictionary* (a work Sherwood 2012 also repeatedly

However, it is not entirely clear what Sherwood's defenseless "I" is and whether it is really as vulnerable and isolated as she lets on. As it happily and necessarily obliterates the old, liberal, Enlightenment, positivistic subject, it may be that Sherwood's work introduces something like a new über-Enlightenment subject that asserts itself as even more rational, critical, authoritative, and confident in its ability expertly to reveal the shortcomings of liberal biblical criticism and offer universally valid judgments—even as it pretends to be small and defenseless. After all, it is predominantly (though clearly not only) quite a community of Eurocentric intellectual heavyweights—the likes of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, and Charles Taylor—who in Sherwood's book get her where she wants to be and not, say, the likes of Alice Walker, Gloria Anzaldúa, Stuart Hall, or Paul Gilroy.

Indeed, Sherwood and her coauthor Stephen D. Moore (2011, 84–131), in *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto*, exhort biblical scholars to move "Onward Toward the Past" and take up the big questions of universally valid moral critique of Scripture.<sup>10</sup> Yet, if Anderson and Albrecht suspect that some communities of postcritical/postliberal interpreters conceal the same old mythological norm identified by Lorde, I wonder whether Sherwood's "I" does not (inadvertently) conceal a similar (though not identical) sort of liberal subject—even as she recognizes clearly how liberal criticism so fully and problematically serves the liberal Western status quo (at least in relation to a Muslim other).

There is much to be commended in Sherwood's (and Moore and Sherwood's) work. The concern that biblical scholars might be able to speak profoundly and coherently to and across a range of contexts that often seem to be discrete units, fragmented and walled off from one another, is appealing and important. Yet, minoritized voices, who have long problematized historical-critical biblical studies and the Eurocentric liberal subjectivity on which it has depended, may end up a bit suspicious of Sherwood's

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cites; e.g., 20, 65, 70, 195–97, etc.) suggests, then it is unclear to me to what extent minoritized critics of the Bible and others whom Sherwood suggests enjoy culturally valorized subject positions would characterize their own experiences and work as valorized. Perhaps ironically in relation to Sherwood's position, the first example the *Oxford English Dictionary* offers for "valorize" is "*the culture valorizes the individual*" (italics original).

10. In fact, if one were to shift Moore and Sherwood's metaphor from a temporal one to a geographic one, it could plausibly be rendered "back to Europe."



unassuming “I” and might again feel their work passed over in favor of a more acceptable, academic and theory-heavy, universalizing Eurocentric criticism. Nonetheless, the sort of critique of liberal criticism Sherwood articulates is important both because it is an erudite account carved out in relation to her Eurocentric community of critics and because it is a critique that has only been moderately heeded by biblical scholars<sup>11</sup>—perhaps because it is one that has been articulated precisely by minoritized or what I will call “more than liberal” subjects.

### The Problems

The efforts of postcritical biblical interpretation growing out of the work of Frei and the postliberals, as well as Sherwood’s critique of the Liberal Bible emerging from interaction with significant postmodern thought, are helpful for recognizing and problematizing the liberal subject on which the dominant paradigm of biblical studies—the context of professional Latinx biblical hermeneutics today—has been constructed. Both sorts of biblical studies, however, seem to reintroduce a liberal subjectivity after having disavowed it or problematized it. This may be inevitable since the postcritical is not *preliberal*, nor *illiberal*, nor even *not* liberal, but is in fact *postliberal*. Likewise, Sherwood’s critique of the Liberal Bible is fundamentally a critique of the pretensions and limitations of liberal biblical criticism and interpretation, and hardly a blanket rejection of all things liberal.

The problem is thus not that something liberal is to be rediscovered in the biblical criticism that both postcritical interpreters and Sherwood are gesturing toward, but that what is reintroduced is covertly too liberal, or too much the same old liberal. With some important intellectual steps forward—and maybe just a little (unintentional) intellectual sidestepping of the contributions of minoritized subjects, communities, and their criticism—the liberal subjectivity smuggled in (behind the community, on the one hand, or tucked away behind the solitary “I” on the other) obscures

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11. See, for example, the helpful handbook on biblical criticism, *Method Matters*, which certainly incorporates newer methods and perspectives into its presentations but does so only insofar as these can be, and are, assimilated into what remains a largely historical-critical vision of professional biblical studies (LeMon and Richards 2009).



the social formations and interests that both projects in interpretation ultimately continue to serve.

### First Kings 21 and Latinx Biblical Hermeneutic Reflections

By considering how the categories of *en conjunto* and *lo cotidiano* might be understood as informing one particular study of 1 Kgs 21, I suggest how Latinx biblical interpretation may point us to a different sort of subjectivity that may be prerequisite for a genuinely different sort of biblical studies, which both the postcriticals and others like Sherwood are pushing toward, but one that is more inclusive of minoritized voices than perhaps those two projects ultimately are. This subjectivity is one that can, of course, generate different readings of biblical texts. However, this subjectivity can also ground a form of biblical studies that addresses some of the important hermeneutical issues that emerge in the work of Frei and Sherwood. For instance, it can include aspects of a fully acknowledged—and not smuggled in—liberal subjectivity that insists on critical interrogation of texts and readers, while refusing any demand to avoid engaging other critical voices or to disavow religious identity in critical interpretation.

My specific reflections on 1 Kgs 21 and Latinx biblical interpretation emerge from studying this passage *en conjunto* with a group of about thirteen people at Primera Iglesia Congregacional de Chicago—First Congregational Church of Chicago. Primera Iglesia is located in the Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago, which is predominantly a Latinx/Hispanic neighborhood, culturally thriving, struggling with crime and poverty, and facing immense gentrifying pressures from the neighborhood to its east. The group in our Bible study was almost equally divided between first-, second-, and third-generation Latinx people who trace their origins to Puerto Rico, Mexico, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic. There were two more males than females in the group, and there was a broad range of educational levels, with a third of the group having attained, or studying for, advanced degrees in theology, while others held a high school education or less. Our study proceeded in both English and Spanish, with translation happening informally as needed. Observations and insights from *lo cotidiano* were welcome in this study, but the study was not explicitly constructed to highlight or elicit the experiential knowledge of the participants. The description of the group and its processes should not, of course, be understood as an ethnographic account. I simply provide information about who participated and what happened in the Bible

study that in part informs this essay. All information is based on notes I took during the study and immediately afterward, some of my later recollections, and conversations with another participant who recalled for me what he remembered to be key aspects of the study.

The study itself proceeded simply, with the reading of a section of 1 Kgs 21 followed by open-ended discussion. The only guiding question for conversation about the text was ¿Qué te llamó la atención?—"What stood out for you?" What called our group's attention from the passage were primarily questions about the moral character of the story's characters—especially Ahab, Jezebel, and Naboth (but not so much Elijah). The motivations of these characters, especially in their relationship to the Israelite community, were naturally enough (given the concern with each character's character) also a prominent theme in conversation. For example, we noted:

- ♦ Ahab's ambiguous position in relation to the community and its customs, as revealed by his desire for gain through acquiring Naboth's vineyard;
- ♦ Ahab's initially being constrained in his efforts at acquiring the vineyard, presumably because of Naboth's appeal to, and strong concern for, legal and customary rights associated with his ancestral heritage;
- ♦ Jezebel's outsider status and her ability to brutally run roughshod over the community's presumed customs and laws in order to acquire Naboth's vineyard to advance the elite position of her husband and herself;
- ♦ God, via his prophet Elijah, being "for" the community (i.e., for Naboth as a representative of the community) and against injustice and violence carried out by figures ambiguously related to the community.

In my summary of our study group's conversation, I use the words *presumably* and *presumed* on several occasions. This is because our group read the story in 1 Kgs 21 in a fashion quite common in both scholarly and popular works—that is, understanding Naboth's refusal of Ahab in light of biblical traditions about the inalienable status of an Israelite's ancestral heritage. As many scholars have noted, however, what exactly is happening in 1 Kgs 21—for example, in terms of legal and cultural traditions and the characters' motivations—is not precisely described in the MT (see, e.g., Seebass 1974; Rofé 1988).

Although we did not explicitly thematize issues of historicity and reality, our group seemed to understand the narrative of 1 Kgs 21 as a realistic story, and easily drew parallels between our contemporary experiences and that story. Such parallels revolved, for example, around community leaders' sometimes ambiguous positions and motivations—local aldermen who ostensibly serve the community but who also seek their own political advancement; the sometimes irresistible and uncontainable power of outside forces vis-à-vis the community—gentrification and criminality; or the costs of taking a stand to protect a community—making political enemies and economic sacrifices of activists.

Whether the account of political violence in 1 Kgs 21 really happened, or whether it happened precisely (or even more or less) as the biblical account describes events, was not at all a central question for our group. What was clear, however, was that the story was regarded as realistic, one that *could have happened*. In fact, from *lo cotidiano*—the real-life experiences of this community reading together, *en conjunto*—it was understood as one that in fact has happened time and again among us—even if the names and details regularly change.

What is more, the group intimately related the stories and experiences of our community to the story of the text. In particular, Naboth—along with the general structure of what was regarded as his communitarian values (and to a lesser extent Elijah and his character)—was regarded as a kind of moral exemplar to which our twenty-first-century lives might at least in part conform. The experience of, and belief in, the divine as active in the life of, and on behalf of, our community (despite clear struggles and assaults on that community) was also affirmed from the structure and plot of the broader story, particularly the prophetic condemnation of Ahab and Jezebel. Juan Martínez, director of Fuller Theological Seminary's Center for the Study of Hispanic Church and Community, has noted that “many Latinx congregations live in expectation of divine intervention in ways that many Western mainline congregations do not” (electronic communication, 12 December 2014). This, I suspect, is a further way in which a liberal subjectivity in some dominant culture congregations and a more-than-liberal subjectivity in some Latinx church communities is operative. That is, a mainline congregation of the dominant United States culture that perhaps is more fully formed by a liberal subjectivity might minimize, or simply avoid, entertaining the possibility of divine action in their midst. A minoritized Latinx or Hispanic congregation, by contrast, formed by a more-than-liberal subjectivity, may be less troubled by potential divine

activities in their modern world. Of course, an expectation of divine activity in contemporary life is hardly limited to Hispanic congregations but can be noted in a range of ethnically diverse congregations, for different theological and sociological reasons.

The real of our community was thus regarded as somehow expressed through the realistic biblical narrative, a story that could have happened and presumably did (recall no one really cared to ask whether it really did or not). I do suspect, however, that at least for two or three participants, part of this lack of concern for history was derived less from a more-than-liberal subjectivity than from a theologically liberal belief that the historical accuracy of the biblical texts is not as important as the religious message they point to. Such an intellectual move would thus be similar to the translating process carried out by some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century liberal scholars that Frei describes, or the ongoing construction of the Liberal Bible by liberal scholars for which Sherwood argues.

All this seems consonant with (though not identical to) Frei's accounts of precritical, pre-Enlightenment European subjectivity and hermeneutic practices, the reading habits of pre- or nonliberal subjects who viewed the Bible's narratives as realistic stories that really happened and the Scriptures as revealing the fundamental reality of the(ir) world, to which their lives might be conformed. However, our study group's conversation also included a host of historical questions. Such questions might, of course, be mapped back to something like a liberal subjectivity and a strong modern historical consciousness, which Frei suggests emerged in post-Enlightenment Europe and which is the foundation for historical-critical interpretation. Our study took place in twenty-first-century Chicago, after all!

The historical inquiries of our group, however, were not designed to question and thereby verify (or not) the story's historicity. Instead, they actually presupposed most group members' basic belief that the story was a realistic account of something that did in fact occur: When did this happen? Where did this take place—in Jezreel or Samaria? Where were Samaria and Jezreel? Can we know whether Naboth was rich or poor? What are the precise laws that would have governed the situation? What is more, our group did not evaluate the truth of the text in terms of its historical veracity, nor seek simply to translate some single historical meaning arrived at via historical-critical methodology into a universal truth or some moral or message for today. There was no obvious or explicit methodological move, in Krister Stendahl's (1962) famous formulation, from "what it meant" to "what it means."

However, other sorts of imminently critical (though not precisely historical-critical) questions and conversation also arose in our study. For example, the group considered the nature of gender roles in this story from ancient Israel. Some in our group initially attempted to characterize Jezebel in terms of the stereotypical, contemporary pop-culture image of her as a sexually permissive manipulator of men. Others suggested Ahab and Jezebel could be perceived (by the author, readers, the characters' contemporaries) as taking on opposite, stereotypical gender roles—Ahab as ineffective and emotional; Jezebel as confident and action-oriented, ready to do what it takes to achieve goals. Jezebel's actions thus could have been viewed by ancient readers as an illegitimate usurping of a man's role, which in "that male-dominated society" would be perceived as wrongly undermining and humiliating her husband—a scenario similar to some group members' experience of machismo in their own culture.

Yet as the study *en conjunto* continued, a consensus emerged that the text's portrayal of Jezebel was one that did not correspond to the stereotypical pop-culture image of her as a sexually permissive manipulator of men. Though Jezebel's actions were recognized as wrong, even reprehensible, there was nothing the group identified in the passage that suggested sexual or gender transgressions on her part; and a quick comparison with 2 Kgs 9:30 and Rev 2:20 was dismissed as not sufficient to support the importation of the dominant caricature of her into our study. Rather, it was fairly quickly recognized, through a kind of critical analysis of the texts and our own social and historical circumstances, that the stereotyping and labeling of women (and in the context of this study, particularly Latinas) who depart from normative, patriarchal gender roles as permissive, emasculating, or just plain wicked is as common and unjust today as it was at the time of this realistic story about Jezebel. The violent punishment of Jezebel (and Ahab, though later rescinded; 1 Kgs 21:19–29) was not discussed much, nor named as problematic. That is an interesting detail of the study since, as Sherwood's (2012) work has suggested, depictions of violence in the Bible are often a significant stumbling block for modern liberal readers.

If our study group's understanding of the story as a realistic one that could have and probably did happen was consonant with Frei's description of precritical reading, the other sorts of critical or ideological questions we took up, it strikes me, are not. Of course, these non-historical-critical but nonetheless critical concerns—such as regarding gender roles in the text and in our community—are perhaps analogous to the quite critical

readings by the premodern interpreters whom Sherwood points to. Sherwood (2012) notes specifically that some precritical, preliberal readers (her examples are mostly rabbinic), for instance, critically addressed the problem with Abraham being commanded to sacrifice his child by the deity. Other examples could be added to Sherwood's. For example, the precritical Pirque of Rabbi Eleazar certainly characterizes Jezebel as wicked because of her actions in 1 Kgs 21. She is also regarded as responsible for spawning idolatry in Israel. Nonetheless, this text—with a broad critical view, one might say—also attributes some *exemplary* actions to her (with respect to proper mourning activities). Chapter 17 of Pirque of Rabbi Eleazar, for instance, states:

גמילות חסדים לאבלים מניין אנו למדין  
מאיזבל

*Woher lernen wir das Erweisen von Leibesdiensten bei Trauerfällen?*

*Von Isebel.* (text and translation, Börner-Klein 2004, 168–71 [84–85])

So, too, our group did not uncritically merely villainize Jezebel. What is more, I did not get the impression that group members (including me, the only professional academic in the room) felt compelled at all to leave their identities as believing Christians to one side (or even modify them) in order to engage in the sort of critical discourse we took up—something the group would have had to do if reading the text as modern liberal critics, if Sherwood's analysis, noted above, is correct. By contrast, I realize that when preparing for the study as a professional biblical scholar in my office at Brite Divinity School—that is, not *en conjunto*, with a community—I was not particularly cognizant of my Christian identity. Was I compelled to bracket this identity when inhabiting this solitary academic space, as Sherwood's analysis might suggest?

However, I suspect too that our group's critical questions and responses around sex and gender roles (with its implicit appeals to gender equality) were not quite the same sort of discourse that those premodern interpreters Sherwood rightly refers to as "critical" would have, or could have, engaged in. Indeed, the positive evaluation of Jezebel in the lines from Pirque of Rabbi Eleazar that I note above is motivated more by a detail in the biblical text and less, if at all, by any critical concern to acknowledge and resist gender stereotyping. Noting that 2 Kgs 9:35 mentions that the dogs did not devour Jezebel's hands and feet, Pirque of Rabbi Eleazar suggests this is because these are the parts of the body with which she car-

ried out her exemplary actions (see Börner-Klein 2004, 170 [85]). By contrast, to a large extent the critical questions that were raised and discussed by our Bible study group, though provoked by the character of Jezebel, seemed to emerge from something like a liberal subjectivity. There is too much of the liberal in the analysis and critique—too much unpacking of the ideological aspects of the text and our own communities—to be fully at home in a premodern, nonliberal context. (Similarly, the indispensable critical work of unmasking the pretensions of historical-critical objectivity, neutrality, and the quest for singular meaning that minoritized critics have engaged in are also to a significant extent a function of a liberal subjectivity.) Put otherwise, such liberative critical discourses sometimes betray a deep commitment to liberal values (e.g., equality, freedom, a certain version of rights-based justice, and so forth) and often (though not always) appear as the work of an individual, rational interpreter going to work on an object—a text or a community of interpreters—to unmask its or their ideology.

Simply put, or put otherwise, since I am not sure I'm able to put this simply, this study of 1 Kgs 21 *en conjunto* and in light of *lo cotidiano*—and now in dialogue with the work of Frei and Sherwood—suggests something like the convergence of a nonliberal reading subjectivity and a liberal reading subjectivity. It is a not completely liberal subject position—or a more-than-liberal subject position that is analogous perhaps to the hybrid experience, identity, and bi- or multicultural subjectivity of many Latinx people in the United States.

Of course, this sort of hybrid subject position is not an essential characteristic that all Latinx people, always and everywhere, inhabit; it is also surely one that in its broad shape is shared by others, especially other minoritized persons. Yet, whether provisionally identified and finalized in any particular time and place as Latinx or something else, this sort of hybrid subjectivity is surely in some sense related to the dialogical relationship that Hispanics or Latinx people (and others) have had with the liberal West (at least in the United States)—a relationship of belonging and not belonging, of being inside and outside at the same time.

As theorists such as Kwame Anthony Appiah have suggested, racial and ethnic identity categories, though socially constructed, are no less real for being so constituted. Physical characteristics, language, cultural markers, and so forth facilitate the racialization and ethnicization of minoritized persons by the dominant culture. Though aspects of racial and ethnic identity might be chosen or rejected, voluntarily adopted or



refused by an individual, other aspects of socially ascribed racial and ethnic identity cannot be resisted simply—and ascribed features of race are less easily resisted than those of ethnicity (Appiah 2005).

On the one hand, migration results in the presence of a large group of individuals in the United States who—because of their origins outside Europe, North America, or elite classes in their home countries—might be said to possess more-than-liberal, and often deeply religious, subjectivities. These migrant communities are also easily and thoroughly racialized as Hispanic and strongly socially marked as other (in terms of language, physical characteristics, legal status, religion, culture, and so forth), more so than is sometimes the case for second- and third-generation Latinx people. On the other hand, this othering of migrants from Latin America can also be symbolically associated with second- and third-generation Latinx people whose origins are in the United States, resulting in their (further) racialization/ethnicization and social othering as well. The presence of the eternal first generation, of course, also provides a social space for second- and third-generation Latinx people to remain in close contact with more than liberal subjects from Latin America. Such space thus helps to construct and maintain the hybrid subjectivity of many second- and third-generation Latinx people as well.

### Conclusions

Studying 1 Kgs 21 *en conjunto* and in light of *lo cotidiano* in a Latinx/Hispanic church context thus highlights the more than liberal, hybrid subjectivity of many Latinx and Hispanic readers of the Bible in the United States. This sort of more-than-liberal subjectivity might provide a foundation on which to construct and theorize a form of critical (Latinx) biblical studies that finds its space next to, and indeed takes up in itself (rather than opposes itself to), the historical criticism that still in different forms dominates professional biblical studies and which is founded on a liberal subjectivity. This form of critical biblical studies can also incorporate features and goals of precritical, postliberal, and postmodern biblical interpretation as well as aspects of liberal (historical-critical) biblical interpretation.

On the one hand, in a (Latinx) biblical criticism founded on a hybrid, more-than-liberal subjectivity, there is room for the critical, rational, and historical aspects of post-Enlightenment criticism, without this criticism being reduced to a positivistic and strongly historical endeavor. On the



other hand, such a biblical criticism need not insist that critical readers leave aside religious identity in the study of a sacred, textual object but will be open to the hermeneutical concerns of such readers, including the expectation of genuine, new understanding and transformation of the reader, or community of readers, who engage the Bible. Such a transformation may come through interpretations that engage both historical and suspicious ideological critiques, on the one hand, or via engagement with interpretations and perspectives of other subjects or reading communities, on the other. In this way, a critical (Latinx) biblical hermeneutics will not so much repair the breach between historical-critical work and hermeneutical understanding that Frei identified as much as refuse to enter it. What is more, it can do all openly, without suspiciously smuggling in a familiar liberal subjectivity, as postcritical work and a project such as Sherwood's seem vulnerable to doing.

Of course, the above reflections touch on a range of hermeneutical issues and questions (inevitably sometimes superficially) that cannot be explored fully in a single essay. What, specifically, are the forms of biblical studies Latinx biblical interpretation should engage in? What precisely is the relationship between historically and ideologically informed exegesis of biblical texts and the transformative understanding these texts might produce in readers? What further responses ought to be generated for critics who regard Latinx hermeneutics as largely (and problematically) pragmatically self-referential or too subjective? How ought such hermeneutic reflections to engage theological discourse about Scripture (e.g., notions of inspiration, authority, canon, Word of God), given that *that* discourse (and not hermeneutical discourse) is the primary idiom by which those communities of faith that still constitute a major constituency for Latinx biblical critics speak about the Bible?

By way of conclusion, I offer briefly a few comments on a tension I perceive to be at work for those biblical scholars in the academy interested in gaining distance from a liberal subjectivity and the historical-critical methods associated with it that most of us were trained in. Akin to Sherwood's (2012) contention that liberal biblical scholars regularly are compelled to translate their interpretive conclusions into the norms of liberal discourse and ideology, this tension regards a strong demand to translate our interpretive work, and the work informed by and carried out in and through our (regularly quite religious) communities, into terms (i.e., a content and form) that make sense and are compelling to the liberal academy. When we do that, or try to do that, something critical may be lost

in translation. We do this translation work, I think, not only because we can and we may want to, but more fundamentally because other options are regularly made unavailable, closed off. Even radically contextually oriented critics who wish to bring into academic biblical studies the interpretive work of more-than-liberal subjects are usually obliged to rehearse the forms, aesthetic, and logic of mainstream academic biblical studies—just as I am doing now (see Schlag 1991).

An outstanding question for me, which emerges from a study of 1 Kgs 21 *en conjunto* and in light of *lo cotidiano*, then, is, How do we best bring the sort of critical work that moves beyond and between liberal and other subjectivities into the liberal academy? How do we (or can we) escape somewhat the normalizing demands of liberal subjectivity of the academy, while not (in good hybrid fashion) simply abandoning those methods altogether? Indeed, the church Bible study of Naboth's story related above was not only an academic exercise, undertaken in the way such exercises are typically carried out in academic institutions. The Bible study was a critical exercise framed by song, prayer, *abrazos y besos*, all of which helped (re) constitute the participants' subjectivities as students of the Bible in that ecclesial context and which impacted the nature of our readings.

One strategy for cultivating a more-than-liberal, or other-than-liberal, subjectivity within biblical scholarship might be to experiment more with the form of the academic work we present and the way we present it. This would mean adopting and adapting more consciously within the liberal academy itself the forms of critical—even if not liberal critical—discourse (songs, stories, analogies, movements, and so forth) that are the idiom of work undertaken *en conjunto* and in light of *lo cotidiano*.

In my experience, many African American and other Africana scholars are making significant contributions in precisely this regard—for example, in *The Africana Bible*, edited by Hugh Page (2009), and other contributions such as Emerson Powery and Rodney Sadler's (2016) *The Genesis of Liberation: Biblical Interpretation in the Antebellum Narratives of the Enslaved*. Powery and Sadler's depiction of the biblical interpretation undertaken by formerly enslaved African Americans authors, the "freedom narratives," in fact suggests a hybrid critical subjectivity similar to the more-than-liberal subjectivity I am sketching. The biblical interpretation of the formerly enslaved authors not only drew on the social-critical sensibilities that were birthed in them by their experience as Africans (or descendants of Africans) in bondage to Christian masters who used the Bible to justify their enslavement. The formerly enslaved also brought this experience to bear

in a critical evaluation of the contradictions of a society that claimed to be founded on liberal values of equality and freedom as enshrined in texts such as the United States' Declaration of Independence and Constitution.<sup>12</sup>

To my own mind, and in large part because of my own subjectivity and scholarly focus, I find Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) classic gender- and race-critical text *Borderlands/La Frontera* to be a model of more-than-liberal form. This text, whose content emerges from a more-than-liberal hybrid subjectivity, also breaks from the typical shape of an academic book in its form. For example, to a large extent as a bilingual book, it leaves long passages written in an oral, borderlands dialect of Spanish untranslated. The colloquial Spanish, not standard French or German—as in the translation of the lines from Pirque of Rabbi Eleazar above—just stands there, awaiting a reader. What is more, although aspects of the book are composed in typical academic theoretical style, it includes long poetic and literary pieces that are not subsequently extensively commented on or explained by the voice of an expert liberal subject. Rather, these other forms also just stand there and do their work in their own way, inviting readers of all stripes to engagement and transformative understanding, while also stymying efforts at interpretive closure and control by a (liberal) reading subject (see Sommer 1999).

Mikhail Bakhtin notes that “each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types*” of utterances, which he calls “speech genres” (1986, 60, emphasis original). Genres take up and talk about the world in a particular way that other forms of speech cannot capture.

In essence, language, or functional, styles, are nothing other than generic styles for certain spheres of human activity and communication. Each sphere has and applies its own genres that correspond to its own specific conditions. There are also particular styles that correspond to these genres. A particular function ... and the particular conditions of speech communication specific for each sphere give rise to particular genres, that is certain relatively stable thematic compositional, and stylistic types of utterances. Style is inseparably linked to particular thematic unities ... to particular types of construction of the whole, types of its completion, and types of relation between the speaker and other participants in speech communication (listeners or readers, partners, the other's speech, and so forth). (64)

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12. The notion of a more-than-liberal subjectivity is also consonant with post-positivist thinking (see Alcoff et. al. 2006).

If Bakhtin is on target, a robustly critical biblical studies ought to be able to move beyond a liberal subjectivity with its accompanying modes of discourse and should welcome an exploration of the variety of forms in, through, and by which scholars present our critical work. Sherwood (2012) appears to recognize this point and in fact takes up such an exploration of form through the fictional letter of Isaac to Abraham that she includes in her study. Yet, even if it were not presented as a work annotated by Sherwood's scholarly voice (albeit a somewhat ironic scholarly voice), the academic argument and rhetoric of the letter itself seems to undermine her experiment with academic form. Essentially all that the letter says—and more importantly, how it says what it says—is close to the form and content of other chapters of her academic book. Put otherwise, although Sherwood's book often helpfully explores texts and cultural artifacts that mainstream, historically minded biblical scholars might consider as out of bounds, the form of her work, even at its most transgressive, is not nearly as radical as that of Anzaldúa's (1987) work. Minoritized biblical critics can continue to lead the way in this regard.

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Why Did Naboth Say “No!” to a King?  
Some Considerations *before* Attempting a  
Reading of 1 Kings 21

Angeline M. G. Song

The LORD forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance.  
—Naboth to King Ahab, 1 Kgs 21:3

When I first read the narrative of 1 Kgs 21 about how Naboth rejects King Ahab’s request for his vineyard, my initial reaction was that Naboth was an idealistic fool. This was no way to respond to a ruler, I thought to myself. After all, the king was not a mere commoner but ostensibly the most important man in the land; from my perspective, the monarch’s request signified an order or an edict, which, to me, brooked no opposition on pains of severe punishment.

Colliding Contexts

King Ahab’s request also did not seem too unreasonable to me. From the sociopolitical location of postcolonial Singapore, where I was born and raised, the government had and still has the legal authority to take whatever private land it deems necessary for the sake of national interests. My own Peranakan (of mixed Malay and Chinese ethnicities) ancestors apparently have had to give up inherited land at diminished prices to the government under the powerful Land Acquisition Act. This act, imposed in 1966, a year after Singapore gained full independence, is still in force today. The provisions of the act also cover cemetery land; with regards to this, I have been directly affected, as I elaborate later in the essay.

Like most, if not all, Singaporeans affected by the act over the years, my ancestors would have pragmatically obeyed this law regarding ancestral

land, as I did some forty-plus years later regarding cemetery land. There would have been no legal recourse to disobey, and in any case, Singaporeans generally accept their government's policies, believing them to be in their best overall interests in the long run. Through such an ideological framework, therefore, I wondered how Naboth could have been so unaware of the power dynamics I discerned as operating in such a situation. Furthermore, the king's offer seems economically viable, almost generous: he is not demanding that Naboth give up his parcel of land for free, but offering another of even larger value in exchange—or else its monetary equivalent.

Not least, Naboth's response to the king sounded abrupt, even arrogant, to my ears: "The LORD forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance," Naboth declares. This is an outright rejection, without any indication that he will at least reflect on the offer. Nor has Naboth bothered to couch his words in a less direct or more tactful manner that might convey a sense of respect for the king's status as ruler of the land. Such behavior would have been deemed inappropriate in the hierarchically conscious society in which I have been brought up. Naboth's calling on the name of Yahweh and invoking the memory of his dead ancestors also seemed overly dramatic.

From my Asian perspective, where the concepts of shame and honor as well as maintaining face in the public sphere are so vital, Naboth's outright and presumably public rejection of the king means the monarch is not being given any face or face-saving recourse whatsoever. This would especially be the case if there were people around who were privy to the conversation, such as the king's bodyguards or the workers on Naboth's vineyards. (I also address the latter group of people in this essay.) Thus, my instinctive interpretation of Naboth was that he was a tactless idealist, who was committing an act of kamikaze by blatantly insulting the most powerful man in the land.

### Entering a Different World

Today, I am living in a different sociopolitical context. I am living in Aotearoa New Zealand (to use both its indigenous and legal names) as a first-generation Southeast Asian immigrant, within a predominantly Western culture. The indigenous people are the Māori, and the nonindigenous New Zealanders, traditionally of European descent, are known as Pakeha, a term rendered by the Māori. In such a context, I am considered an Other, and perhaps doubly minoritized. I am distinct even from the increasingly

large numbers of immigrant Chinese from mainland China especially to Auckland, the country’s biggest city in terms of population and commercial activity; yet, I am constantly classified as one of them because of my physical appearance.

Living in a radically different context from where I was educated and brought up means that I have to learn to negotiate different sets of histories, narratives, and traditions, which, in themselves, are also dynamic and constantly evolving. Unexpectedly, it was only while living as a highly hybridized other in my adopted country of choice that I became capable of imagining a radically different concept of land and land management, one that has significant parallels with that of Naboth/the biblical narrator of 1 Kgs 21. Such a reimagining was enabled when I began to explore the worldview of a Māori friend named Colenso Eramiha, a member of the indigenous race of the Ngapuhi tribe. Colenso (as his friends call him) was recently confronted with a Naboth-type scenario, and his response was diametrically different from that of my ancestors and my own—just as it had significant alignment with that of Naboth/the Old Testament biblical narrator.

To put it another way, it was only when I assumed the mindset of an indigenous concept of land—through empathically listening to and experiencing through Colenso’s lens—that I began to have a *real* sense of the biblical narrator’s/Naboth’s ideology of land. This led me to ponder the question: How did Colenso and I arrive at such different starting points, resulting in our radically different views of land? And subsequently, what are some considerations that I as a reader should bear in mind *before* even attempting a reading of the text? I approach the question in two stages.

First, I self-reflexively and self-consciously examine the sociopolitical and ideological context that has informed and shaped my initial reading of 1 Kgs 21. As Judith McKinlay (2013, 12) puts it, “The process of unraveling, revealing and exposing ideological interests involves asking questions not only of texts but of ourselves.” Even if we think we know that we always read from particular histories and cultures, we may not realize their *full* implications and effects on our readings. This is especially true for postcolonized, minoritized readers such as myself, whose ideological baggage has, often unconsciously, been shaped by colonizer projections of us—what Frantz Fanon (1967, 13) calls a toxic “epidermalization”—which informs our self-imaging. In addition, we may be deeply influenced by the nationalistic and political agendas and ideologies of our postindependent governments, or neocolonialism.

Second, I *explore* the ideological context that undergirds Colenso's perspective regarding the concept of land and land management. The juxtaposition of our two narratives, hopefully, highlights the different kinds of ideological baggage that we as readers may bring to a text.

Finally, from a new space of enhanced self-awareness and other-empathic understanding, I issue a brief re-visioning of 1 Kgs 21, as a "post" consideration of the text (Rich 1993, 167). Here I am using the term as Adrienne Rich (167) does, where *re-vision* refers to "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction.... It is an act of survival." While Rich is discussing feminism and what having a feminist consciousness entails, her quote is just as appropriate here. As Stuart Hall (1990, 236–37) notes: "The politics of self-(re)presentation ... resides not in the establishment of an identity *per se*, full fledged and definitive, but in its use as a strategy to open up avenues for new speaking trajectories, the articulation of new lines of theorizing."

#### Personal Relevance of an Ancient Text

Some years ago, when I was in New Zealand pursuing a bachelor of divinity as my second degree, I received an unexpected letter from a law firm in Singapore. The letter informed me that I had inherited a sum of \$15,000 from a great-great-grand-aunt (grandfather's auntie), a Singaporean Peranakan matriarch named Lim Yam Neo, of whom hitherto I had never heard. She had died in 1898, and the money was reportedly derived from the enforced sale of her estate, which had comprised four big plantations near or in central Singapore, the largest of which was 94 acres. The other three plantations were 12 acres, 4 acres, and 26,000 square feet in size. These descriptions are listed in legal documents given to us, her descendants, by the Singapore lawyers who were acting as her trustees. My great-great-grand-aunt had left her estate as a trust in perpetuity, a strategy that had apparently been popular with wealthy Peranakan matriarchs or patriarchs to ensure that their memory prevailed down the generations. This is because under the scheme, even if the land parcels were sold, the proceeds from the estate could not be distributed until twenty-one years after the death of the last male survivor in the family.

In those days, the plantations were inhabited by squatters or farmers who would cultivate and live off the land by planting gardens and fruit trees, and raising pigs and chickens. Many of them were Malays, the indigenous people of Malaya, and they lived in *kampung*-style (vil-

lage) *attap* dwellings. An *attap* dwelling is a traditional Malay house made out of plank and with an “atap” roof, that is, a roof made out of sturdy husk material that is cooling in the tropic heat. The houses are also often built on stilts (see, e.g., Teo and Savage 1991, 313–14). The Malays paid token ground rentals of about \$3 a year, or else they would pay in kind. My auntie, who lived in Auckland with me before recently passing away, remembered visiting some of the plantations with her father in her childhood days and recalled how some of the farmers would rush up to her and my grandfather with gunnysacks full of tropical fruits, including rambutans, mangoes, mangosteens, jackfruit, *cempedak*, and bananas. At times, they would be given chickens and quail’s eggs.

The Japanese occupation of Singapore during World War II temporarily interrupted this way of life. However, even greater disruption came after the war, when the British returned after the Japanese surrender. Besides police repression, one of the policies implemented in Singapore by the British to help quell leftist violence and independence movements, which were prevalent throughout Malaya during the early 1960s, was a forced resettlement of the inhabitants. The British policies included a master plan: inhabitants in the central city were forcibly resettled into the suburbs, and satellite new towns were created with the intention of dispersing the main opposition bases in the city (Tremewan 1994, 46).

When the People’s Action Party (PAP) took over as the first government of independent Singapore in 1965, it built on the British policy because it realized the value of forced resettlement in state-controlled housing as a means of consolidating its political power and destroying the traditional base/s of its opposition (Tremewan 1994, 46). Under the compulsory urban resettlement scheme, farms, squatter settlements, and other forms of cheap housing had to be demolished and its inhabitants relocated and rehoused in multistory concrete government flats controlled by the government’s Housing and Development Board. As Linda Lim (1989, 183) states: “Compulsory urban resettlement provided the PAP with the opportunity of breaking up established and potential opposition electoral communities by dividing up old ethnic, working-class communities for resettlement in dispersed locations.” The squatter dwellers and famers on my ancestor’s plantations would have been affected by this resettlement policy. According to historian Christopher Tremewan (1994, 47), those who resisted faced police riot squads. On the other hand, the resettlement policy met a genuine need for good housing, and it received popular support, at least in theory. However, the blitzkrieg pace with which this and

other housing and urban redevelopment policies were carried out caused some hardship and (initial) opposition.

### Singapore's Land Acquisition Act

A powerful legislative instrument with which such development policies were carried out was the 1966 Land Acquisition Act implemented by the ruling party. The act effectively allowed the government to acquire whatever private land it deemed necessary for the sake of national interests, including the creating of state housing and widening of roads. As Singaporean sociologist Chua Beng-Huat (2003, 76) puts it, the act "effectively placed all land holding under constant threat of compulsory acquisition by the state." Revised in 1985, the act remains in force today.

Under these postwar and postindependence circumstances, it is likely that large segments of my great-great-grand-aunt's parcels of land would have been acquired, with monetary compensation fixed at valuation of the land at time of acquisition. The proceeds from the enforced sale of those parcels of land presumably became part of the Lim Yam Neo estate to be held as trust in perpetuity. At various times during my growing-up years, I heard several of my older relatives talk about how family land had been taken by the government. The stories were, however, always spoken about in general terms and with an air of resignation and submission, without a hint of active resistance. Many years later, around 2009, when I received news about being a fortunate recipient of a portion of these proceeds, my reaction was similarly pragmatic. I simply and gratefully used the money to pay off my bachelor of divinity fees at a theological college in Auckland, and hardly gave the matter of land acquisition any thought.

### Acquisition of Cemetery Land

In 2008 I had to return to Singapore in order to relocate the ashes of my grandfather, whose grave at a large public cemetery had been exhumed by the authorities, who wanted the land for a new public housing estate.<sup>1</sup>

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1. I am referring to what was formerly the Bidadari Cemetery in Upper Aljunied Road. After this cemetery was exhumed, the Teochew Kwong Hou Sua cemetery in Woodlands Road followed in 2009, with little proper documentation of its former inhabitants. At the time of writing this, another cemetery, Bukit Brown Chinese Cemetery, had been earmarked for redevelopment. The latest decision caused some gen-

My aunt was upset but not overly surprised by the news, for as Yeo Wei-Wei (2003, 247) notes: “Economic pragmatism dominates Singaporean life on macro and micro levels. Change to the environment is nearly always implemented for economic reasons. Planning aims to achieve an ever more efficient use of limited land resource.” As for me, I buried my personal emotions under a well-learned veneer of pragmatism and undertook the task in as matter-of-fact a fashion as possible.<sup>2</sup> Years later, upon being tasked with this assignment of issuing a minoritized reading of 1 Kgs 21, I revisited the episode with the aim of probing the underlying ideology that had informed my initial understanding of the story. Therefore, I think it pertinent here to examine the particular personal and historical circumstances of my social location.

### Adopted into Peranakan Family in Postcolonial Singapore

I was born after Singapore had gained full independence from the British and had separated from Malaysia. My biological parents decided to give me up, as they were poor and preferred to keep their male children rather than the girls, owing to a traditional patriarchal mindset. I was adopted into a Peranakan or Straits Chinese family, a people of mixed Malay and Chinese heritages whose ancestors settled in Southeast Asia long before the British came. In fact, the term *Peranakan* literally means “local born.” For all intents and purposes, I have assumed my adoptive mother’s (sub) ethnicity, since I have never met my biological parents, nor have I any detailed knowledge of their/my ancestry. My adoptive mother was a single woman who never married; she was a true-blue Peranakan, meaning that both of her parents are of Malay Chinese ancestry and are descended from generations of “pure” Peranakans born in Malacca or Singapore. The Peranakans were thus localized and distinct from the waves of Chinese

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erally passive Singaporeans, including heritage groups, to call for a reconsideration, resulting in the government setting up, for a first time, a committee to ensure, among other things, that proper records of the graves are made before redevelopment begins. For more information, see Chong and Lin 2011.

2. From Bidadari Cemetery to the All Saints Church columbarium on Poh Huat Road. Due to the scarcity of land available for burial purposes, the demand for columbariums in Singapore is so high that it is not unusual for Singaporeans to reserve lots in columbariums before they die. For example, my auntie gave up her reserved space so that my grandfather’s ashes could be relocated.

immigrants (*totok* Chinese) who arrived later, especially at the end of the nineteenth century, and who regarded China as their ancestral homeland.

### The Peranakans' Self-Fashioning in the Colonial Contact Zone

On the other hand, the Peranakans have long been ambiguous about their status as ethnic Chinese. Having been a hybrid community since the thirteenth century, they had, as cultural thinker Ien Ang (2001, 51)—a Peranakan Indonesian who resides in Australia—rightly notes and I personally attest, “lost many of the cultural features usually attributed to the Chinese, including everyday practices related to food, dress and language.”

During the British occupation, particularly when Singapore, along with the Malaysian states of Penang and Malacca, became a part of the British Straits Settlements in 1826, the Peranakans allied themselves with the British and looked west rather than east. Their construction as a separate subethnic group from the other Chinese was reinforced by the policies during the British colonial era. Since the British mostly ruled from afar, they needed local intermediaries who would act as their middlemen in dealing with the locals. They chose the Straits Chinese because of their ability to speak English and their networking relationships with the indigenous people of Southeast Asia and China (Kwa 2010, 50; Trocki 2006, 17, 48). In the course of time the Peranakans rose to powerful and influential positions within the local economy (Trocki 2006, 19).

Ideologically, the Straits Chinese aspired to be like their colonial masters and delighted in being called the “King’s Chinese” or “Queen’s Chinese” (Lee and Chen 2006, 21). For instance, Song Ong Siang, who was born in 1871, was a queen’s scholar who read law in England and was the first Asian in Singapore and Malaya to be knighted for his work in the colony. Together with another prominent Peranakan, Lim Boon Keng, Song (1923, 319) formed the Straits-Chinese British Association on 17 August 1900 in order to “promote among the members an intelligent interest in the affairs of the British Empire, and to encourage and maintain their loyalty as subjects of the Queen.” As administrative officer of the Singapore Volunteer Corps, Song (247), in his own words, exhorted “the Straits Chinese as British subjects to render whatever services they were capable of to King and Country.” Song (1923) is most well-known for writing a six-hundred-page book, *One Hundred Years’ History of the Chinese in Singapore*, which highlights prominent Peranakans and other Chinese during the period 1819–1919 who made their fortunes under



British colonial rule. Chronicling the early history of Singapore, his book is still influential today.

My own adoptive grandfather, Song Chin Eng, who is related to the older Song, was a member of the Volunteer Corps and excelled in English sports such as rifle shooting. He worked as a comprador at the Great Eastern Life Assurance Company, mediating between his “orang puteh” (meaning “white men” in Malay, or, as in this context, “Englishmen”) bosses and the locals who worked as insurance agents on the ground. Such a stance can be regarded as the Peranakans’ conscious “self-fashioning in the colonial ‘contact zone.’” Here I am appropriating the phrase “self-fashioning in the colonial contact zone” from the title of Tzu-hu Celina Hung’s (2009) paper. The influence of Mary Louise Pratt (1991, 34) may be detected on Hung as well as my evocation of the term.

However, the Peranakans’ world turned upside down when the British started withdrawing in the 1950s. When increasingly large waves of new immigrants arrived from China, the Peranakans were confronted not only with a new economic reality but also with a dilemma that threatened their sense of identity and belonging. They neither fitted in with the other Chinese communities nor totally belonged to the Malay community. To put it another way, they “found themselves unacceptable to both Malay and Chinese ethno-nationalists” (Khor 2010, 129). In retrospect, I realize that for the Peranakans owning land in Singapore was a way of demonstrating their loyalty to the country.

### Growing Up as a Peranakan in Postcolonial Singapore

Growing up in a Peranakan household meant I had English-style breakfasts of toast and eggs instead of Chinese noodles, and I spoke and even dreamed in English and *baba Malay* instead of a Chinese dialect or Mandarin. As a schoolgirl at a Catholic mission school formerly set up by British nuns, I read books by Thomas Hardy and Jane Austen and performed plays by Shakespeare rather than Chinese classics such as *Journey to the West* or *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

However, being a child of the first generation of citizens of the new Republic of Singapore meant I had to learn to assimilate into the mainline dominant Chinese majority and learn Mandarin for purposes of national unity. I did well in my Mandarin exams, too, as getting a good grade was a prerequisite for admission into the National University of Singapore, then the country’s only university. However, unlike what

the assimilationist policies indicated, Mandarin was *not* my mother tongue; instead, my mother tongue was/is *baba Malay*, which was not recognized as an official mother tongue. As Ang (2001, 36) puts it: “If I am inescapably Chinese by descent, I am only sometimes Chinese by *consent*. When and how is a matter of politics.”

So what were the politics, the distinct ideopolitical construct under which I grew up, learned to imbibe—and had my being? What new set of beliefs, attitudes, and values did I have to learn to internalize, which, until today, still undergirds and informs much of my approach and worldview?

### An Ideology of Unity and National Survival

Lau Siew Mei (2000, 211), in her book titled *Playing Madame Mao*, has a character called “The Chairman” utter the following words that many postindependence Singaporeans would recognize as being reflective of the views of the People’s Action Party leadership and their justification for adopting pragmatic strategies: “But first things first. Life is a war. Life is not meant to be easy. Nothing in life is ours for free. I had to learn that during the war. You ask me why I chose independence? Because no one, no one is going to look after your interests for you. That was what the war showed others and me living here.” These words capture well the essence of the People’s Action Party government’s overarching ideology of survival, which undergirds its policies and affected the everyday living realities of its citizens such as me. While some historians and foreign-policy analysts would perceive the People’s Action Party government as taking advantage of Singapore’s expulsion from Malaysia and British withdrawal to “exploit public insecurity” and create “an ideological climate favourable to its political survival” (Tremewan 1994, 106), many Singaporeans genuinely grieved the country’s ejection from Malaysia and considered the subsequent policies and exhortations to harden up and fend for ourselves as citizens of a small and newly independent nation a legitimate response.

As citizens of the new Republic of Singapore, we were strongly encouraged to strive for excellence and become a rugged society made up of individuals who exercised self-discipline and made short-term sacrifices in order to gain long-term benefits. Being pragmatic was seen as a virtue; there was no time for sentimentalism and nostalgia. Instead, we were urged to unite in the national drive to develop, modernize, and achieve economic success as rapidly as possible. In other words, economic success

was deemed to be vital for the country’s survival in a hostile, postcolonial, and rapidly industrializing world.

This push for survival demanded that we had to quickly learn to internalize a new set of social attitudes and beliefs, which involved the exercise of self-discipline and social responsibility, so that where necessary, the needs of society—or national interests— could take precedence over individual desires. The argument for this communitarian ideology was that, if the nation as a whole did not prosper, neither would the individual. As Singaporean sociologist Chua Beng Huat (2005, 420) notes, “This communitarian ideology has achieved a high level of consensus with the population, in spite of persistent complaints against its anti-democratic ways by liberals, at home and abroad.” Hence, the Land Acquisition Act, which might not even have seen the light of day in a Western country, still exists in Singapore today.

Above all, many Singaporeans believe that the continued survival of the People’s Action Party government was vital in the postcolonial nation’s drive to achieve economic success and that it knows more than any other what Singapore’s best interests are in the long run. The government is thus invested with a lot of power, and its old guard has for a long time been regarded with utmost respect bordering on reverence and even a measure of fear by the general populace. The People’s Action Party government’s strong, patriarchal (some would say, dictatorial) hold over Singapore is evidenced in the fact that the party has been in power for almost fifty years. My initial reading of Naboth as being too idealistic issued from such a sociopolitical context, undergirded by an ideology of pragmatism and communalism.

### Exploring the Māori Concept of Land through a Māori Friend’s Lens

When I first arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand, I aligned with the Pakeha on many fronts, especially with regard to land as a commodity, as a piece of real estate. I was advised, when looking to buy a house, to avoid buying Māori land, as it apparently operates under different rules. I obeyed the instruction without investigating the whys and wherefores and carried this passive attitude into my approach regarding my new life in New Zealand. This attitude of keeping my head down, working hard, and being respectful of all cultures without asking too many questions partly stemmed out of my feeling of dislocation and powerlessness, living in my new context. After all, how does one even begin to explain a subethnicity that does not fit anyone’s notion of

racial categories? These words of Shirley Geok-lin Lim (1996, 169)—born of a Chinese father and a Peranakan mother, and who spent her girlhood in colonized and then war-torn Malaysia before leaving for America—resonate strongly with me: “As an alien resident, I feared I was already asking too much. Too much acceptance of my British[-Singlish] colonial accent, my brown color and Asian features.... I could only hope to fill the interstices, foreign to all, and mutable, like a small helpful glue.”

Lately, however, as a biblical scholar who prioritizes readings of the biblical text from one’s socioeconomic location in all its complexity, and due to my growing friendship with a handful of Māori men and women, in particular Colenso, I have become motivated to attempt an *exploration* of Māori philosophy and, for the purposes of this paper, the traditional Māori concept of land. Following John Patterson, I am deliberately using the term *explore*, because, as a non-Māori, I consider myself an outsider who attempts to gain a deeper and empathic understanding of Māori culture and, within that worldview, their concept of land and land management. I agree with Patterson (1992, 9) that the word *explore* is appropriate because it conveys “the idea of an outsider, who is in a position of relative ignorance, approaching unfamiliar territory.... Like any exploration it provides a sort of map of a territory, but the map is to be treated with caution. Different explorers notice different aspects of a territory, and will produce different maps.”

I am well aware that, as an outsider, it is likely that I will commit mistakes of perception, interpretation, and translation, no matter how careful I try to be. Ultimately, however, I have decided that it is better to make the effort to genuinely understand Māori philosophy and culture, while acknowledging my personal limitations, than to not attempt at all due to fear of making mistakes. The aspects I map in this segment are based on the insights I have gained from carefully and empathically listening to Colenso’s story (see Song 2012 for a hermeneutic of empathy). I then use that as a vehicle through which to arrive at a deeper understanding of the Māori traditional concept of land, one that is so different from my own.

#### A Standing Place on Which to Put One’s Feet Down with Full Confidence

Several years ago, Colenso and his seven siblings were approached by a Pakeha developer to sell their four-acre piece of mostly undeveloped ancestral land up north, three and a half hours’ drive away from Auckland, where Colenso lives. The offer was an attractive one in economic terms.

Colenso’s six older siblings were keen to sell, but Colenso firmly resisted—and succeeded in getting his siblings to agree with him. My question to him—Why did you not want to sell the land and earn some money?—led to a series of interesting conversations between us.

First, it was clear that Colenso had developed a personal bond with his family land; he knows the name of every tree, bridge, and river on his land—names that had been given by his ancestors (see Sinclair 1992). As a child, he had spent much of his time in the humble family home, listening to his mother tell stories about his grandmother and ancestors, who had all walked, laughed, cried, and died on that piece of land. For Colenso, therefore, the place is imbued with the memories and spirits of his ancestors, and filled with stories of the brave exploits of the Ngapuhi tribe. For many Māori, their inherited land is a symbol of continuity with ancestors and connection with family. For example, Colenso is able to point out the exact spot next to the fence line where one of his sisters had been born and remembers how, as a child, he would obey his mother’s instructions to not venture near a specific corner of the land that is considered sacred, for it is where his dead ancestors were washed prior to burial. By keeping the land, Colenso feels that he is honoring the memory of his ancestors and carrying on the important tradition of guarding the land.

This high regard for one’s ancestral land can be discerned in the common Māori name for land: *whenua*, which is also the term for “placenta.” In fact, there are cultural practices associated with the meaning of *whenua* as placenta, umbilical cord, land, and *whanau*, which refers to the close-knit Māori extended family unit (Mead 2003, 269–70). For example, in one practice, when a child is born, the child’s placenta is buried in the ground; the dried-up remnant of the umbilical cord is hidden in a cliff or in a tree or also buried in the ground. These practices are, furthermore, undergirded by the traditional belief that humankind is derived from the loving union of the earthmother, Papa-tu-a-nuku, with the sky-father, Rangi-nui-tu-nei (see Sinclair 1992, 64). It is such a spiritual worldview of land—intangible yet no less real—that, in Colenso’s eyes, gives the place a spiritual value that transcends any price he might get in the economic marketplace.

Here is where Colenso feels he *really* belongs, the one truly uncolonized space, if you like, where he says he can place his feet down securely and in full confidence. His insistence is an authority born out of genealogy. To appropriate the words of Hiwi Tauroa and Pat Tauroa (1986, 8), it is the knowledge that his ancestral land is “the family home of generations that

have gone before. It is the standing place of the present generation and will be the standing place for the generations to come.”

This Māori idea of “a standing place for feet” from which one gains the authority to belong and stand tall is known as the concept of *turangawaewae* (Salmond 2004, 60; Mead 2003, 272). “A standing place for feet” is frequently used in relation to the Māori’s place of privilege and right to stand tall and speak in a *marae*, simple translation: a Māori meeting house (Salmond 2004, 60; Tauroa and Tauroa 1986, 8). However, I suggest that the concept, by extension, is equally appropriate in this context, and Colenso uses similar ideas and terms to describe his relationship with his ancestral land. Through their *turangawaewae* or connection with the land, established through ancestry or descent, the Māori gain rights as *tangata whenua*, meaning “people of the land” (Salmond 2004, 60).

I can relate to Colenso’s point about his ancestral home being the one place where he feels he can truly come into the fullness of his personal and cultural identity as a Māori, without fear of disruption or distortion. As an adopted child who has no knowledge of her biological ancestry, I often have a sense of feeling rootless and anchorless in the world. Even though I have assumed the Peranakan identity, at times I feel like a fraud, because I am not one by birth; I wonder whether ethnicity is a matter of bloodline or upbringing. The feeling at times of not having a place to stand with full authority is compounded when one becomes an immigrant and a minoritized other in a new country. Hence, the sense of belonging and identity of which Colenso speaks as being deeply associated with land and the Māori concept of *turangawaewae* resonate strongly with me.

Colenso intends to leave his share of the land to his children and future descendants as a legacy and has, over the years, been cultivating this same love for the land within his two grown-up children, aged nineteen and twenty-three. He makes regular trips from Auckland and makes light of the three and a half hours it takes them to get there. “I use the time in the car,” he says, “as an opportunity to teach my children the history of their land, about their ancestors, family tree and tribal connections. In the car, they are my captive audience—they can’t escape!” Colenso says that for now it is his responsibility to be the caretaker or guardian (*kaitiaki*) of the land, and he intends to hold this role until his children are ready to “take over the mantle.”

## A Reimagining of Naboth

Through Colenso’s eyes, I entered—or perhaps reentered?—a world(view) that was radically different from the one framed within the parameters of Western enlightenment, where there is often a disjunction between the material and the spiritual. Earlier, through my Western-educated mindset, while I had been able to cognitively understand that Naboth’s behavior in 1 Kgs 21 was meant to convey a particular theological vision of land as not only inherited from his ancestors but also given to them by Yahweh to symbolize their relationship with Yahweh (Bruggemann 2002, 257; Davies 1974, 3–48, esp. 27–35), I could not *truly* get a sense of such a concept of land because it was far removed from my experiential reality. Only through empathically listening to and hence experiencing Colenso’s spiritual notion of land through his lens did I come to a new appreciation of Naboth; I began to realize that I was presented with a concept of land that was possibly as uncorrupted by the ideological clutter of colonialism, nationalism, and/or neocolonialism as it could possibly be.

Recently, when I turned back to the text of 1 Kgs 21:3, Naboth’s speech to King Ahab sounded different to my ears: this time, I hear him say that losing the vineyard would be like losing his *turangawaewae*—the “standing place” in which he has always been able to plant his feet in full confidence, secure in the knowledge that his ancestors go before him. This was the place they were finally able to call home and come home to after all those years of wandering and wondering. In this sacred space, therefore, Naboth, truly belongs and is able to come into the fullness of his identity. Most importantly, I hear him say, when he takes care of this vineyard, he is honoring a promise made long ago by Yahweh, the God of his ancestors, and the God whom he has come to believe in with all of his heart. Giving up this particular piece of land would therefore be like severing the life force that has hitherto given his existence meaning—as well as a hope for the future.

## Excursus

The brief background overview may give some understanding of the impact of British colonization of Aotearoa during the nineteenth century on the Māori, who were originally from Polynesia but had been in the country for about one thousand years before the British arrived (Gagné 2013, 21). British colonization became more intense after 1830. This



period coincides with the success of the missionaries in getting the Māori interested in the gospel. British colonization led to an increased demand for land by the settlers. The Treaty of Waitangi of 6 February 1840, signed between more than five hundred key Māori chiefs and a representative of the (British) Crown, was a turning point. The treaty text had been written in Māori and English, with only thirty-nine chiefs signing it in the English version. Each side interpreted the treaty differently.

According to historian Claudia Orange, many of the Māori chiefs signed the treaty in order to get Britain's protection from other external aggression, to stop intertribal fighting, and, not least, because of their trust in the advice of missionaries. The trust stemmed from the fact that by 1840 nearly half of the Māori population had accepted Christianity (Orange 2013, 40–41). An important tenet in the English text, especially for the purposes of this essay, was the right of preemption, where all land had to be sold via the Crown, meaning that, if the Māori wanted to sell their land, they had to sell it to the government, who could subsequently sell it to the European settlers at a higher price. Māori communities resented these restrictions and became increasingly disillusioned. For them, the story of the treaty has a variety of different understandings and implications, one of which is that “the Treaty was a covenant in the religious sense, forged between the Crown and Māori on the basis of a close personal relationship begun before 1840” (11), an understanding particularly associated with the Ngāpuhi tribe.

With the increasing arrivals of European settlers and pressures on land, the pace of Crown preemption purchases accelerated, especially during 1840–1865. “[By] 1911, Māori held only seven million acres, a quarter of the North Island. By 1920, they held 5 million acres, most of it leased to Pakeha, and only a fifth usable for Māori agriculture” (cited in Gagné 2013, 26). (For more details on how much land was purchased, see Orange 2013, 53.) However, one needs to be careful about “the picture of naïve Māori victims succumbing to legal chicanery and the blandishments of cunning Pakeha land buyers and storekeepers,” as many among the Māori were also eager to sell due to intertribal rivalry for *mana*, meaning spiritual power, authority, prestige, status (cited in Gagné 2013, 26). Increasing dissatisfaction on the part of the Māori led to “bitter and bloody” (cited in Gagné 2013, 26) wars over land and *rangatiratanga* (sovereignty) in the decades from 1850 to 1880.

In 1975, the Treaty of Waitangi Act was passed, which set up a tribunal to hear Māori claims. Ten years later, the powers of the tribunal were



enlarged, most significantly allowing it to investigate claims arising from events from 1840. Today, the tribunal serves as a forum for resolving historical grievances and is integral to both the shaping of the nation as well as the Māori search for the “true” meaning of the treaty (Orange 2011, 12). (For more information, see Orange 2011; 2013.)

### A Reimagining of 1 Kings 21 or Some *Post*considerations of 1 Kings 21

#### A Way of Resisting Colonization

Although he does not use the precise terminology, saying no to selling his ancestral land is Colenso’s way of overtly resisting (further) colonization, his way of keeping uncolonized the land on which his ancestors stood. One of Colenso’s first comments to me when I asked why he had not wanted to sell his uncultivated land was: “Because I do not want the Pakeha to get any more Māori land.” His objection is an understandable sentiment, given New Zealand’s colonial history and its legacies, which “continue to stand at the heart of New Zealand life ... an awkward and frequently divisive heritage, generating faultlines across the cultural and political landscape” (Ballantyne 2012, 11).

Often the tension and sense of betrayal that tend to dominate the understanding of the country’s past center on issues of land and land management. As Alistair Reese (2008, 40) puts it: “The relationship of Māori to their land is highly complex, but it is clear that the loss of this land (under colonization), as well as having significant economic ramifications, impacted significantly on the whole cultural and spiritual balance with their communities.” From such a perspective, Colenso’s actions can be seen as a peaceful way of resisting further colonization—on the physical, cultural, and psychological fronts. By keeping the physical land uncolonized, he is also psychologically defending his cultural and spiritual head- and heart-space.

Just as Naboth and Colenso both said no within their contexts of inequality, so also I am learning to stand up and say no to the implicit but strong pressure to assimilate totally and uncritically within the dominant Western culture, for to do so would be to submit to Western constructions of knowledge about me as an exotic other. Instead, I am learning to gradually formulate my own narrative space by owning, naming, and drawing on the richness of my Asian Peranakan ancestry and tradition, and forging my own Asian Peranakan Kiwi self-identity. Writing an essay such as this in the world of Eurocentric biblical interpretation and hence raising

awareness of subcultures and highlighting the issues associated with them is one such practical outworking.

In this manner, therefore, I “resist and transcend binary models by which the West has categorized its Others” (Sugirtharajah 2006, 65). Suffice to say here that, in carving out my own interpretive and practical standing space, I am also cautious not to unintentionally step on feet that belong to those who have fought hard to earn *their* space. In this regard, Colenso’s imagery of “dancing a little to the right, dancing a little to the left” is helpful, with its connotations of empathic listening, engagement, and dialogue, building on the similarities that all oppressed peoples have and learning, where appropriate, from the distinctions, as this essay has sought to demonstrate.

What about Naboth’s Vineyard Workers?

My revisioning of 1 Kgs 21 has also led me to wonder about an unnamed, unmentioned group of subalterns in the Naboth story: the vineyard workers on Naboth’s land. Even though the text is silent in this regard, it is not unlikely that Naboth’s land was large in size and that he hired people to work for him on his vineyard. I suggest that there is nothing in the text that suggests otherwise. Furthermore, I contend that, if King Ahab noticed this plot of land and desired to own it, it might not only be because of its strategic location, since it was close to the monarch’s palace, but also due to its impressive size. In addition, just as squatters had lived on my ancestors’ land in the past, it is possible that these workers lived on some corner of the land with their families. If this was the case, then their lives would have been greatly disrupted as well when Ahab and Jezebel acquired the vineyard, just as the squatters on my ancestors’ plot would have been dislocated and suffered hardship. While traditional interpretation holds Naboth up to be a hero and a martyr for resisting the indecent proposal of King Ahab, the proletariat seems to have been all but forgotten. On the other hand, it can be argued that, when Naboth stood up and said no to the king’s takeover of his land, he was also standing up for the livelihood and rights of his unnamed workers.

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## It's *Whenua*, Stupid! A Māori Twist on 1 Kings 21

Nasili Vaka'uta

Why should ostensibly sovereign nations, residing in territory solemnly guaranteed to them by treaties, decide that they [indigenous peoples] are willing, after all, to surrender their ancestral homelands?

—Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native”

*Ko Papatūānuku to tatou whaea*

*Ko ia te matua atawhai*

*He oranga mo tatou*

*I roto i te moengaroa*

*Ka hoki tatou ki he kopu o te whenua*

—Mere Roberts, Waerete Norman, Nganeko Minhinnick, Del  
Wihongi, and Carmen Kirkwood, “Kaitiakitanga: Maori  
Perspectives on Conservation”

This work rereads 1 Kgs 21 within the context of Aotearoa (New Zealand) using a framework for interpretation that is situated in Māori epistemologies. This type of reading involves a shift from the conventional modes of biblical interpretation to initiate changes at the methodological level. This shift asserts it is not enough for contextual readers to merely recognize one's context and draw correspondences with texts. Reading lenses and positions have to change in order for one's interpretation to be relevant to those on the ground.

### Context Matters

Judith McKinlay (2014), in *Troubling Women and Land*, attempts to read selected texts from the Hebrew Bible from the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. (From here on I use the name *Aotearoa* unless otherwise indicated.) The volume displays McKinlay's scholarship as much as it draws

my attention to a significant turn in mainstream biblical interpretation in Aotearoa. Some of the features of the volume worth noting are as follows. First, McKinlay takes into account not only the histories of her colonial heritage but also their negative impacts on the indigenous people of Aotearoa. Second, in this volume she is neither preoccupied with texts nor with her feminist-postcolonial agenda, but rather she listens to lost voices of people who have become victims of empire. Third, she stays true to her location and culture, with the ability to move beyond and around, thus enabling her to interrogate not only texts but also herself and her own settler history.

While this is a commendable effort from McKinlay, and it is a good platform for scholarly dialogue around the issues of gender and land in a region where there is more water than dry space, there is more she could have done. One option would have been to incorporate some perspectives from indigenous Māori. The other option would have been, as I do in this essay, to *adopt* a Māori lens for reading.<sup>1</sup> As in the case of McKinlay's work, Aotearoa is my context of reading. Unlike McKinlay, however, I read the biblical story using a framework situated within the ideology and context of Māori epistemologies—the term *Māori* refers to the indigenous people of Aotearoa (or New Zealand). *I am neither a Māori, nor am I speaking for, or on behalf of, Māori*. But I have decided to adopt a Māori reading lens for several reasons.

First, as a native of Tonga, a Polynesian island in Oceania, who resides in Aotearoa, I closely identify myself with the struggle of Māori to maintain their *tinio rangatiratanga*—that is, their “paramount power and authority,” especially their rights over their ancestral land (Mutu 2010, 13). This is an experience shared by most, if not all, islanders in Oceania as they try to come to terms with colonial settlers' aggressive land grabbing over the years (see Fairburn 2015).<sup>2</sup>

Second, there is an urgent need to expose the injustices and evils behind the ongoing aggressive (neo)colonial and neoliberal policies and

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1. I do so by constructing a framework is done with *epistemic humility* and with a spirit of *indigenous solidarity* more than anything else. There is no intention whatsoever to argue that this is the model for Māori. Nor do I claim that I have the right to (mis)represent Māori and their rich cultural capital.

2. I must also acknowledge that Tahitians of Maohi Nui, Kanaks of New Caledonia, natives of the Marshall Islands, and most parts of Micronesia are still under colonial rule and control. Some of those natives have had to live with the consequences of nuclear tests by colonial regimes such as the United States and France.



practices that shape and drive the Aotearoa society, past and present, which serve the interests of colonial settlers to the detriment of Māori. Third, as a migrant, I take it as my obligation under Te Tiriti o Waitangi<sup>3</sup> to acknowledge the *tangata whenua* (indigenous people of Aotearoa) as the first people, and the rightful *kaitiaki* (guardians), of the land. Integral to that obligation is to make sure that there is a deliberate and genuine effort on the part of non-Māori, such as myself, to take into account the interests of Māori in whatever we do. This requires more than historical references, as McKinlay does. It requires some changes at the hermeneutical and methodological level, hence the adoption of a Māori lens in this work. Fourth and finally, as a biblical critic with a liberation bias, I pay attention to the positioning of subjects in scriptures and in real life in relation to power and access to scarce resources such as land.

### Contextual Questions

There are some significant questions to ask when doing a contextual project such as this, and they are as follows:

*Who am I as a reader?* This question acknowledges that interpretation is performed by real people and thus requires a good understanding of oneself and one's limitations and biases, as well as one's identity and position. This is essential to interpretation. Understanding oneself is a prerequisite to understanding others. Knowing one's limitations creates a sense of epistemic humility that is necessary for the meaning-making task.

*Where am I reading from?* Real people do not reside in a vacuum, so this question requires that each interpreter must learn to understand their social location or context of interpretation. The fact of the matter is that everyone reads from a venue—that is, a location or standpoint from which one looks at texts. That shapes the worldview and perspectives of that

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3. This is “a written agreement made in 1840 between the British Crown (the monarch) and more than 500 Māori chiefs. After that, New Zealand became a colony of Britain and Māori became British subjects. However, Māori and Europeans had different understandings and expectations of the treaty.” Source for this citation? Is it Claudia? AQ: Are the previous two sentences questions to yourself or to the reader? Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the document Māori understood and signed. The Treaty of Waitangi is the document the government upholds, but its meaning is at odds with the Māori version of Te Tiriti. See Orange 2012. I am indebted to Arapera Ngaha for the distinction between the Māori version and the English version of Te Tiriti.

person. One's venue includes matters such as political allegiance, religious affiliation, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and so forth. A good understanding of one's context offers a great platform for interpretation.

*How am I going to read?* A contextual reader needs to make a careful decision around the way the reader is going to interpret a text. Such a decision is significant because the meaning one gets will depend on the kind of questions one asks. One has to make sure one asks the questions that matter, especially the hard questions—questions that carry the concerns of one's community and context, questions that represent the interests of those one is reading with. The latter is the concern of the next question.

*Who am I going to read with?* Choosing the questions to ask is as important as choosing one's reading partners. One has to ask oneself: Who/what am I most concerned with in the society? Who/what do I identify myself with in the text? Proponents of postcolonial biblical interpretation are right in saying that we have to do away with "reading for" and "reading to" modes of interpretation (West and Dube 1996). This is about consciously deciding which underprivileged group in one's context one reads with. That group in turn draws the agenda for interpretation, that is, the questions to ask.

*To what end is my reading?* Last but not least, every interpretation must have a clear goal. One needs to be aware that interpretation is fused with competing interests. Therefore, it must be asked: *Whose interest do I serve through my interpretation? What is the goal of my reading? What do I hope to achieve from this reading?* This needs to be clear in order to make interpretation worthwhile, rather than just a futile exercise in making meaning that is not meaningful to anybody.

These are questions that inform the development of the framework I employ in this work and in my works elsewhere (Vaka'uta 2011, 2013, 2014).

### Sketch of a *Whenua* Hermeneutic: A Māori Lens for Interpretation

The framework for interpreting 1 Kgs 21 in this work is based on the Māori concept of *whenua*, which is an essential factor for defining identity and belonging in Māori culture (Vaka'uta 2016). The term itself generally refers to land, as do its equivalents in other Polynesian languages, such as Tongan *fonua* (Vaka'uta 2009) and Fijian *vanua* (Tuwere 2002). These related concepts have some minor variation in meanings, but they all signify connectedness of people to land and vice versa. In that sense, *whenua*

encompasses more than just dry land. What follows are the key aspects of *whenua* that constitute this interpretive framework for interpretation.

First, *whenua* is land. Henare Tate (2010, 38), a Māori theologian, speaks of *whenua* as “the land in all its physical and geographical features. *Whenua* is land as country. *Ko te whenua tēnei o Aotearoa*—This is the country of Aotearoa; land as territory. *Ko te rohe whenua tēnā o Ngai Tahu*—That is the territory of *Ngai Tahu*; the ground on which we tread.”

Second, *whenua* is a source of life that provides sustenance for *tangata* (people) and all other living creatures. *Whenua* also “gives *tangata* a sense of identity and belonging. Created realities such as *rangi* (the sky and the heavens), *whetū* (the stars), *rā* (the sun), *marama* (moon), *hau* (the winds), and the like are here understood as aspects of the creation that have an influence upon the *whenua*” (38).

Third, *whenua* is a living entity, and she is female. She is the earth mother, and her name is Papatūānuku (Cadigan 2010, 60). The Māori metanarrative tells that Papatūānuku interacted with the sky father, Ranginui, and brought forth offspring, who begot more offspring. In this sense, *whenua* is considered to be the womb or placenta (also called *whenua*) that gave birth to Māori and their descendants. *Whenua* also refers to the placenta, which is often returned to the earth in a ceremonial practice that recognizes the connection between humanity and Atua (Papatūānuku) and acknowledges the obligations of the parents to retain their *whakapapa* by returning sporadically throughout the child's life to the land and the *hapū* (tribal group) where the placenta is buried, thus maintaining both a physical and spiritual connection to the land and the people of the land. The connection between people and land, therefore, is likened to a mother-child relationship in which one does not own the other; rather, they respect and care for each other. Here lies the significance of the word *tangata whenua* as a reference to only Māori as the indigenous people of the land (Tate 2010, 2), while Pākehā (non-Māori people of European descent) and everyone else are referred to as *Tangata Tiriti* (people of the treaty). This bond is strong and is therefore culturally inappropriate to break or violate.

The idea of selling land was unknown in Māori culture until the arrival of colonial settlers with their alien and aggressive attitude to the land and with no regard for Māori worldview and sovereignty. Tui Cadigan (2010, 61) writes,

Māori traditionally do not sell the land because she is a relative and of the primary line of their genealogy. For Pākehā land was and is a commodity

for use and disposal *according to one's desire*. From a *Pākehā* perspective a person without land is still fully a person and although land ownership can articulate wealth, a person without land *can still rise to importance in society*. However, a *Māori* without *whenua* is nothing, a no-body.

Fourth, *whenua* not only has a mutual link with its inhabitants but also creates a connection from one generation to the next and ties the whole of creation together and to Atua (god/creator). This link is what *Māori* refer to as *whakapapa* (Cadigan 2010, 60). *Whakapapa* signifies the interconnectedness of everything in creation and everyone to the past, to each other, to their surroundings, and to the divine. To disturb the *whenua* is, at the same time, a disruption of the relationship among these parties.

Fifth, *whenua* is a source of *mana*. The word *mana* is a common Polynesian term, but in *Māori* culture it refers to spiritual power or prestige (Cadigan 2010, 61; cf. Independent Report 2012, 171–77). *Mana* is understood to be an essential part of existence and is derived from three primary sources: *Atua* (god/creator), *whenua* (land), and *tangata* (people). With regard to *whenua*, *Māori* speak in short about *mana whenua*, but the longer version goes like this: “*te mana o te tangata ki runga i te whenua* [the *mana* of people in matters pertaining to the land]” (Tate 2010, 105). *Whenua* empowers *tangata*. However, this spiritual empowerment and prestige is tied specifically to one's particular place in the *whenua*, which is known among *Māori* as *tūrangawaewae*. That is the sixth aspect of this framework.

Sixth, *whenua* gives *tangata* a *tūrangawaewae*, which means “a foothold, standing place or home-land” (Tate 2010, 289). *Tūrangawaewae* is one's place to stand; it is where one can speak with no fear or restriction. One's standing place is where one gets one's *mana* and finds spiritual strength. A *tūrangawaewae* gives a person a sense of rootedness and stability. To lose that place, for a *Māori*, is to become homeless and without connection to the *whenua*.

These six points are the basic elements for a *whenua* hermeneutic, and they serve in this work as lenses for reading 1 Kgs 21. I provide two readings of 1 Kgs 21. The first is a literary analysis of the text, and the second is a *Māori* reading.

### Visiting Naboth's Vineyard: A Literary Reading

The story begins and ends in Jezreel. The plot moves geographically from the vineyard, where Ahab bargains with Naboth, to the palace, where

Jezebel pledges to provide for her husband, to the town, where the people accuse and kill Naboth. From the town, the narrative returns to the palace, where we encounter the joy of possessing the vineyard. The story ends with the event at the vineyard (where it all began), where judgment on the royal household is pronounced. With the help of minor and unnamed characters, the plan of the major characters comes to pass. The plan opens with a depressed Ahab, due to Naboth's refusal, and ends with a repentant Ahab, due to Yahweh's judgment.

First Kings 21 is a story that has attracted scholarly attention from various hermeneutical camps. Five such interpretations are outlined below.

Phyllis Tribble (1995) reads the text focusing on the Jezebel-Elijah relation. She does her reading in the light of the Deuteronomistic theologians' "passion for polarity" (3). Providing a lot of insights into the interplay of various perspectives in the text, and with interest in the figure of Jezebel, she downplays the significance of Naboth as another suffering subject of the story.

Judith McKinlay (2002, 314), in the same vein, negotiates the frame for viewing the death of Jezebel. Her interest with the "woman in the window" is done at the expense of the man executed in the city. To give 1 Kgs 21 a fair treatment, the fate of Naboth needs to be given close attention, alongside other characters.

Thomas Brodie (2004) traces the intertextual links between the Naboth story and the Stephen text in Acts 6:9–14 and 7:58a. By comparing the two texts, Brodie points to considerable similarities between them. In Brodie's words, "The similarities (theme, general structure, sequence of actions, some details) are such that, rather than attribute them to coincidence, it seems reasonable to conclude that Luke has deliberately adapted or distilled the Naboth text" (432).

Jerome Walsh (1992) acknowledges how reading methods bring out different meanings from the text. He offers, therefore, a stylistic, syntagmatic, and paradigmatic readings of 1 Kgs 21. The stylistic reading focuses on the surface structure of the text, which includes scenic arrangement, use of language, and so on. The syntagmatic reading focuses on the sequential structures underlying the story, such as plot and motif development (193). The paradigmatic analysis examines structural relationships of narrative roles (294). With these methods, Walsh opens up different aspects of the story.

William Schniedewind (1993) reads kings Ahab and Manasseh side by side, offering a comparative-diachronic probe into their historicity. In

contrast, my reading of the story focuses on how the Deuteronomist's religious bias against foreign women shapes the fate of the characters (see Long 1985).

The prologue (1 Kgs 21:1) locates the story in Jezreel and thus breaks away from where the preceding chapter ends. After the battle with the Aramaeans at Aphek (20:30), to the south, Ahab returned north to Samaria (20:43), the capital of Israel. He must have continued further north, probably to get away from the pressure of war and other crises in the city, and perhaps to enjoy the company of his queen, Jezebel, at the tranquility of Jezreel. Here the identity of the king is slightly altered. Whereas in chapter 20 Ahab is referred to repeatedly as "king of Israel" (20:43, for example), he is now "king of Samaria." That situates him sociospatially outside the boundary of Jezreel. In the same manner, Naboth is identified in terms of space as "the Jezreelite"; he is a native of Jezreel, a local.

The attachment of place names to characters is a significant form of identity construction. Ahab is portrayed as stepping into the domain of Naboth. Jezreel is now the space where Ahab and Naboth meet. Naboth is also represented as an owner of a vineyard adjacent to the palace of Ahab. The proximity of his vineyard to the royal palace must have given him a sense of security. That assurance fades away as soon as he and Ahab come face to face.

Without delay, the story leaps into the vineyard, unfolding the conversation between the vineyard owner, Naboth, and the interested buyer, Ahab. Apart from the narrator, no one else witnesses the event. The king opens the conversation with an offer: vineyard for a better vineyard, or vineyard for money. This offer echoes the deal he made with Ben-Hadad before (20:34). That one was political; here it is agronomic—an exchange for an agricultural purpose: "a vegetable garden" (21:2).

As king, Ahab probably did not expect the response he received from Naboth: "The LORD forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance" (21:3). Naboth responds to the request from a different perspective from the one taken by Ahab. He situates himself within Israel's religious tradition, especially the laws of Jubilee outlined in Lev 25:8–17, 23–25; 27:16–25. The appeal to tradition is a way to remind the king of his ignorance and of the responsibility he should be taking with regard to the land. There may be other vineyards, but they are not on his ancestral land. The phrase "my ancestral inheritance" serves as the key to Naboth's reply. Such property was safeguarded by the covenant and was not intended to be sold. If sold, however, it must be returned to the original owner when it comes

to the year of Jubilee. The most striking fact about this reply is that this is the first and the last word Naboth speaks in the whole narrative. With a few words, he makes his point clear, yet prepares the stage for his upcoming execution. What is he supposed to do? Remain silent and accept the request with reverence? Surely, Naboth does not expect what is coming.

Disappointed by the validity and strength of Naboth's reply, Ahab returns to the palace with the mood he had after the prophetic rebuke regarding his treaty with Ben-Hadad (20:43): "resentful and sullen" (21:4). That makes him so depressed that he loses his will both to speak and to eat (21:4). This opens the door for Jezebel to enter the story as a concerned wife. Expecting to enjoy the company of a husband who has just come back from battle, Jezebel wants to make sure everything is going according to plan. After all, that is what brought them to Jezreel in the first place.

Within the limit of the narrative, Jezebel seems to escape the spatial identification given to Ahab and Naboth. In fact, however, she enters the story as an already constructed subject. She is the "daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him" (16:31; see Bronner 1968). In terms of space, she is Jezebel the Sidonian. Like Ahab, she is not a native. Unlike Ahab, she came to Jezreel and never had the joy of returning. Jezebel is further identified by her religion: a Baal worshiper! This additional information builds up her image as the Other, standing in contrast to Yahwistic figures such as Naboth and Elijah. With that, she became the first lady of the nation. With that, she sought to serve her husband the best she could (Montgomery and Gehman 1986).

When (mis)informed of the situation (Ahab does not provide the reason for Naboth's refusal: namely, the Lord forbids!), she was probably shocked by the way kings were treated in Israel. Coming from a royal family herself, she knew how to behave as royals, especially if one is the king. Listen to her advice: "Do you now govern Israel? Get up, eat some food, and be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite" (21:7). That is how kings behaved in Sidon; so should Ahab (McKinlay 2002, 310). Trible (1995, 10) comments: "Her view of kingship enjoys a precedent in Israel."

Now Jezebel shows Ahab how Sidonian queens act. A document is written, sealed with the royal signet, instructing elders and nobles in Jezreel what to do: call a fast, put Naboth in front, accuse him with a capital offense, and then stone him to death. The real reason behind this call is not given. All is expected to be done on the false basis that Naboth "cursed God and the king" (21:10). Jezebel, as a foreigner, addresses the situation



from the position of an outsider, with little knowledge of Israel's land laws. Had Ahab explained to her, she probably would not have done what she did. With the little understanding she has, the narrator picks on her as an easy prey, accusing her of inciting her husband to do evil. With the Yahwistic election ideology, Jezebel is doomed to be displaced from the point she enters the scene to the point she leaves.

As it is written, so it is done. From the palace the story shifts to the town hall, where a supposedly religious gathering of the elders and nobles contemplates killing an innocent subject: Naboth. The elders and nobles are identified as Naboth's fellow Jezreelites. That makes the situation even worse. Naboth is about to die in the hands of his own people. The event is indeed a corruption of justice and a violation of the life of an innocent man. The two accusers are labeled as worthless subjects or sons of Beliyya'al. This is, of course, a case of how people are manipulated by their leaders to do what they want to do. The manipulation is also a case of how political institutions use religion and religious figures to push their own political agenda. In such a situation, ordinary people, such as Naboth, become victims.

The news of Naboth's death reaches the palace. Did Ahab know about the plot against Naboth? Does he see the death as a mere coincidence? Here the reader is left to speculate. Again, as in verse 7, Jezebel commands Ahab and tells him what he should do: "Go take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite" (21:15). The sheer dependence of Ahab on Jezebel's guidance is amazing. That makes him the weakest subject in the story: a king with no authority. However, at the palace, Jezebel ponders on a mission accomplished. She then exits the scene, having satisfied the narrator's wish: to portray her as the main cause of Ahab's demise. She recedes into obscurity, having served her duty to her husband.

From the palace she controls everything for the king's sake. She never went to the vineyard and never left the comfort of her home. Yet, her presence in Jezreel was greatly felt. However, from this point on, the story returns to the place where it all began: the vineyard. In 21:1 the vineyard served as the space of encounter between Ahab and Naboth. Here, again, it is where the king meets the prophet. Before, the event was one of negotiation; now, it is one of judgment. The king, on the one hand, goes to the vineyard on account of his wife's command; the prophet, on the other, also goes to the vineyard, but on account of the Lord's command. When the two meet, judgment unfolds.



Ahab, in the words of the Lord, is charged with two offenses: killing and possessing. The verdict also follows: dogs will lick his blood at the same place where Naboth's blood was licked. The message conveyed by the prophet is twisted a little, with some new phrases added on. The Lord's initial judgment focused on the king only. In Elijah's words, responding to Ahab's question, judgment falls on Ahab's household as well as on Jezebel. So goes the verdict against Ahab: "Indeed, there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD" (21:25). His abomination was twofold: (1) he walked after the idols, and (2) he caused Israel to sin (21:22, 26). Because of that, evil will befall his house, not in his days, since he is repentant, but in the days of his son.

### Revisiting Naboth's Vineyard: A Māori Reading

At this point, I revisit Naboth's vineyard with a particular focus on land/*whenua* as my hermeneutical key. I also look at events that happened there, how land is perceived by different parties in the story, and the consequences of clash in perceptions when power is involved. The sequence of events is discussed above. The key question now is: what contribution, if any, can a Māori reading bring? Through the lens of *whenua*, a number of important insights can be gathered.

First, Ahab's request to Naboth ignores the importance of ancestral land. The land is not just a piece of real estate. The land is Naboth's main link to his *tupuna* (ancestors) and to God. To let go of it is to cut himself loose from the past and from God; it would break the continuity of his *whakapapa*. The refusal is not just about the land; it is also about the story the land carries and represents. Ahab in the story resembles the colonial attitude to land, which led to the land-grabbing practices of the colonial power in Aotearoa. As a result, many Māori tribes have either lost their link to the past or struggled to maintain their identity. The scarcity of land is a fact of life, and at some point there is a need for compromise. What colonizers and their modern counterparts ignore is that to Māori the *whenua* is not just scarce; it is also sacred. To violently negotiate one's access to *whenua*, as colonial settlers did to Māori and Ahab does to Naboth, is not acceptable by any means.

Second, Ahab's purchase request shows a lack of understanding and respect for the womb that begets them as Israelites. From a Māori perspective, Ahab is persuading Naboth to sell the mother who nurtured and

nourished him and his ancestors. When Naboth refuses, Ahab and those around him snatch from Naboth his main source of life and sustenance: his ancestral *whenua*, his mother. This is a form of rape, and it has grievous consequences. Even if Ahab had taken Naboth's land without killing him, Naboth would still have been dead, so to speak. That is the reality for some Māori and for those whose land has been taken from them forcefully by colonizers and irresponsible neoliberal puppets.

Third, Naboth resembles the status of the *tangata whenua*. The land belonged to him, and he was the *kaitiaki* (guardian), and they have a reciprocal connection. Naboth never claimed ownership of that land. He saw himself as the guardian of the ancestral land and as belonging to it. An important aspect of being a *kaitiaki* from a Māori perspective is that one is not acting as a steward looking after someone else's property. One is a *kaitiaki* because one belongs to what one is guarding. Ahab did not acknowledge that responsibility, and neither did the colonial settlers who showed no respect for the indigenous people of Aotearoa. A common colonial and imperial nonsense that annoys me from time to time is the claim, "We are a nation of immigrants, so we should have equal access to resources." This is often uttered by those who do not know what it means to have their own land and who are only interested in land for financial gains. This implies that there should be no special regard for those who are indigenous to, and have a special bond with, the land. Such a claim, as mentioned, is nonsensical and should be resisted.

Fourth, Naboth's land was his source of *mana*; it gave him spiritual sustenance and a prestigious position. When taken from him, he lost his *mana whenua*, his position and also his life. Colonial land acquisition in Aotearoa has had a similar impact on Māori. What colonizers did not realize was that taking land that belongs to Māori did more damage than just the loss of one's property. The loss of land took away from them the basis on which their lives depended: it displaced them, and they eventually became homeless and disoriented in their own *whenua*. They became exiles in their own home. That is what happened to Naboth, and that is what continues to happen in Aotearoa, and Māori in most cases are the victims.

Fifth, Naboth did not just lose his ancestral land. He also lost his *tūrangawaewae*, his foothold or his standing place. With that went his sense of belonging, his link to the past and his ancestors, to the world around him, to others, and to the divine. Where his vineyard was was the only place on which he could stand. Rightly so, that is where he stood

his ground and had the courage to reject Ahab's proposal. He spoke as a person rooted in his own place. Yet, that was the place for which he was murdered. A lot of Māori in Aotearoa have lost their places, and that has been due mainly to the imposition of alien political measures and economic policies that serve no one else but the market and its greedy agents. Neoliberalism demands that land needs to be traded for profits. When profits are sought at the expense of Māori rights and are not fairly distributed, injustice prevails.

Sixth, the *whenua* laments when one of her children passes. In Naboth's case, one needs to listen to the text carefully in order to hear the *voices of the whenua* and how she mourns the death of her *kaitiaki*, her guardian. A Māori reading listens for the voice of a mother who lost the only child who cared for her. Her voice awakens the Atua (god) to what has happened and leads to the prophet's visit to Naboth's vineyard to sort things out with Ahab, saying, "you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the LORD" (21:20). To violate the sanctity of life and sacredness of the *whenua* is evil. Similar evil deeds happened during the height of colonization in Aotearoa, which resulted in the death of Māori and loss of land. The *whenua* will continue to mourn until justice for the *tangata whenua* is restored.

### Why *Whenua*?

Reading through Māori lenses highlights at least two significant points. First, unless there is an attempt on the part of biblical scholars in Aotearoa to shift from Eurocentric ways of interpretation, the interpretive task continues to yield meanings that are irrelevant to people on the ground. Jione Havea (2014, 7) is probably correct when saying that the Bible is "going stale" in Oceania because the methods of interpretation have gone stale already. Māori of Aotearoa deserve more than the "shit" of the West. They need fresh reading, and that has to start from employing fresh approaches to the task of interpretation. Second, adopting a framework that is different from the traditional Western modes opens up new avenues for interpretation that bring not only excitement back to the task but also a repositioning of one's "reading posture" (Sugirtharajah 2002, 13), grounded in real life and in the community of real people, such as Māori, who value the sacredness of the *whenua* and not as a commodity to serve the interest of a market controlled by a manipulative minority. To that minority, I say, "Respect the *whenua*, stupid!"

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## Coveting the Vineyard: An Asian American Reading of 1 Kings 21

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### Disclaimer

When I was asked to present a paper on an Asian American reading of 1 Kgs 21, the Naboth vineyard affair, I readily accepted. I was already writing a commentary on 1 and 2 Kings; how hard could it be? However, when I actually really started thinking about an actual Asian American reading of this passage, things became more problematic for me methodologically. My concerns definitely had implications on how we racial/ethnic scholars develop a minoritized criticism. I am therefore beginning this essay with a metacommentary on reading a scriptural passage from a racial and ethnic context.

I knew that I did not want to replicate the anachronistic Asian American attempt a few years ago in one of the Society of Biblical Literature sessions, which unsuccessfully read the Sarah and Hagar story as examples of Asian American tiger moms and helicopter moms.<sup>1</sup> At the start, I just could not conceptualize an Asian American reading of the Naboth vineyard story. In the first place, I could not separate the Asian American part of me from the feminist part, the historical-critical part, the literary-critical part, or the social historian part in any analysis I would undertake. When I sat down to analyze the text, one idea would come to me,

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This essay appears in *Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles I*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Archie Lee C. C. Lee, *Texts@Contexts* (New York: T&T Clark, 2017), 46–64. It is being reprinted here with permission of Bloomsbury.

1. Tiger mother/mom and helicopter mom are two Asian stereotypes of Chinese parenting. Tiger moms are very strict in the upbringing of their children. Helicopter moms hover like helicopters over their children's experiences and education.

and I would throw it out as too historical-critical, not Asian American. Or another approach, and I would discard it as too literary-critical, because it might not be recognizable as an Asian American reading. I realized that I could not separate these parts of me, who I am, how I was trained, and my particular exegetical expertise in a number of methods to perform an Asian American reading. In true postcolonial form, I am a hybrid with all the nouns and adjectives we embody with regard to race, gender, class, and, I must add, exegetical training and knowhow. Whatever analysis I do will be an Asian American, feminist, middle-class, sociohistorical, literary-critical, and so forth, reading. This hybridity should be acknowledged in whatever reading we do as minoritized critics.

Second, I found being given the actual text to read from my Asian American perspective to be quite artificial. Although I understood the intent, namely, to experience how different racial and ethnic minorities approach the same text, I bristled at the thought of forcing an Asian American reading on a particular text. Previous readings of the biblical text from my Asian American social location arose more organically, connecting more naturally with the complex aspects of my personal and societal experiences of being Asian American. Although there is comparative value of seeing different racial/ethnic readings of the same passage, I thought the process of imposing an Asian American reading on a text given to me was unnatural. As I talked with other presenters, I discovered that this feeling of artificiality was shared.

### Who Is an Asian American?

Having said all this, I was eventually able to arrive at an analysis of 1 Kgs 21 from an Asian American perspective.<sup>2</sup> Because 1 Kgs 21 narrates the illegal appropriation of land by the royal court, I looked for parallels in Asian American history in which the state or government illegitimately seized the land or property of Asian Americans. I saw several touchstones between 1 Kgs 21 and the Japanese internment in so-called evacuation camps during World War II. One of the takeaways for me in researching this paper as a Chinese American is learning the terrible history of my Japanese American brothers and sisters. A number of different ethnic groups

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2. I am very grateful to Thomas Eoyang for his many suggestions for resources when I started investigating this Asian American reading and to Margie Yamamoto for her own personal experiences of living in an Japanese internment camp as a child.



are awkwardly lumped under the umbrella term *Asian American*: Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Hmong, Thai, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Burmese, Indian, and so forth. These groups have different immigration histories and experiences in coming to and living in the United States. When doing an Asian American reading, one's positionality within and in relation to these various groups needs to be considered.

### The Case of Japanese Americans and 1 Kings 21

I grew up in a family where Japanese-Chinese relations were very conflicted. My maternal grandparents hated the Japanese after the destruction of their ancestral village in the Toishan district of southern China during the Sino-Japanese war of the late 1930s and early 1940s. The Toishan region was particularly hard hit by the Japanese (Chang 2003, 216). One of the worst atrocities of that war was known as the rape of Nanking, during which the imperial Japanese army raped, tortured, and slaughtered hundreds of thousands of civilians in China's capital city, Nanjing, in December 1937 (Chang 1997).

After the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, my maternal aunts and uncles, who lived in Seattle's Chinatown, and my mother, who lived in Butte, Montana, all wore badges saying "I am Chinese," lest white people stigmatize them as the Japanese enemy. After decades of social, cultural, and institutional racism, the Chinese in the United States were now seen as loyal, hardworking, honest allies, while the Japanese had become treacherous, warlike, and cruel (Takaki 1998, 370–71; Lee 1999, 145–49). My aunt reports that the Chinese wore these badges even after the Japanese were evacuated and told me that she wished she had saved them as historical family artifacts. Two other aunts on my mother's side had the audacity to marry Japanese men after World War II, breaking my grandparents' hearts.

The problem in comparing the Asian American experience with Ahab's land grab of Naboth's vineyard/property is the fact that for a good part of their early history in the United States the Chinese and Japanese were not able to own land because of anti-immigrant and alien land laws. Particularly in the western states, where most immigrant Asians settled, laws were passed that declared that an applicant had to be eligible for naturalization in order to be qualified for property ownership. Because Asians were barred from becoming naturalized citizens, they were not eligible to own property.

Significant is the fact that the 1870 Naturalization Act had removed the “white only” restriction on citizenship that had been in force since 1790 and had expanded naturalization rights to those of African descent. Those foreigners who were of neither white nor of African descent were not eligible for citizenship, and therefore not eligible to own property. This became a legal way to limit the rights of Asian immigrants without specifying a particular racial group in the language of the law. The California Alien Land Law of 1913 did target Japanese immigrants specifically in response to anti-Japanese hysteria. Because they were barred from becoming citizens, they were ineligible to own land and also ineligible to hold long-term leases of agricultural land, which constituted much of their livelihood. Some Japanese found their way around this law by purchasing land through white intermediaries or in the names of their US-born citizen children (Lyon 2020).

Before Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt commissioned Chicago businessman Charles Munson to gather intelligence on the Japanese in the United States to see whether they were indeed a military threat. Munson’s findings revealed no evidence of Japanese-American disloyalty or threat of fifth-column sympathies among the Issei (first-generation Japanese immigrants) and the Nisei (their American-born children; Kitagawa 1967). Munson quipped that perhaps the Japanese were “more in danger from the whites than the other way around” (Weglyn 2009). However, his evidence and that of others were suppressed in favor of full-throttle anti-Japanese hysteria and demands for Japanese evacuation and containment in the western states.<sup>3</sup> In response to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on 19 February 1942, authorizing military commanders to designate military areas from which any person could be excluded (see “Transcript of Executive Order 9066” 1942). Although the Japanese were not directly specified in Roosevelt’s order, they were its principal targets. Roosevelt evidently had been considering the internment of Japanese five years before the attack on Pearl Harbor (see Robinson 2001; Takaki 1998, 390).

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3. Japanese Americans living in Hawai‘i were not interned, due to the resistance of General Delos Emmons, the military governor of Hawai‘i, and widespread local opposition to internment, particularly in the Hawai‘ian business community, who knew that evacuation of over one-third of Hawai‘i’s population would decimate its labor force and destroy the island economy (Takaki 1998, 380–85).

Arguing that “military necessity” justified his racist actions, General John (“A Jap’s a Jap”) DeWitt then issued over one hundred military orders to remove and incarcerate over 110,000 civilians of Japanese ancestry living in the areas designated as Military Area 1 of Washington state, Oregon, California, and Arizona (Smith 1991, 82; cf. “Japanese Internment Camps in the USA” 2000–2020). The amount of time for evacuation depended on where one lived. The Japanese residents of Terminal Island were informed on 25 February 1942 that they had forty-eight hours to leave the island. Terminal Island was located near an army base and a naval station, so it was considered a high priority by the military to get them removed (Margie Yamamoto, personal communication). Those living in San Francisco were given a week to leave. They were to bring with them bedding, toilet articles, extra clothing, and eating implements for each member of the family (see the exclusion poster, “Instructions to All Persons of Japanese Ancestry” 1942). They were then taken to ten incarceration camps primarily in remote desert areas, where they lived an isolated, highly regimented life surrounded by barbed wire and security towers (Ng 2002, 13–54; Daniels, Taylor, and Kitano 1991). Regarding this abhorrent part of US history, the report *Personal Justice Denied* (1982–1983), which summarizes the finding of the 1980 Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Citizens, concludes that the broad historical causes of the Japanese internment were not military necessity but “race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership.”

The “sons of Belial” falsely accuse Naboth of cursing “God and king” (1 Kgs 21:10, 13), crimes I interpret as blasphemy and treason. Patriotic Japanese Americans were falsely suspected of being traitors in sympathy with the warmongering Japanese emperor. The coastal areas of the western states were deemed military zones that were vulnerable to Japanese attack, providing a rationale for Japanese American evacuation, even though there was no evidence of hostile or fifth-column activities among them. Moreover, it was also clear that white farmers wanted the Japanese Americans removed because they coveted their productive farmlands. The Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association was quoted saying in the *Saturday Evening Post*: “We’ve been charged with wanting to get rid of the Japs for selfish reasons. We might as well be honest. We do. It’s a question of whether the white man lives on the Pacific Coast or the brown man.... If all the Japs were removed tomorrow, we’d never miss them in two weeks, because the white farmers can take over and produce everything the Jap grows” (cited in Takaki 1998, 389).

Although 1 Kgs 21:2 expressly states that Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard in Jezreel as a vegetable garden, 2 Kgs 9:21, 25 simply states "Naboth's property/portion" (חלקת נביות), referring to Naboth's property in general. There are differences between these two accounts, which has occasioned much debate regarding the original story and its redactional history (Cronauer 2005; Na'aman 2008). For example, in 1 Kgs 21, Naboth's murder is accomplished through Jezebel's sly maneuverings, whereas these are not mentioned in 2 Kgs 9:21, 25-26, where only Ahab is accused. Similarly, 2 Kgs 9:26 cites the murder of Naboth's sons, while 1 Kgs 21 does not. This difference in the perpetrator of the crime will be significant in the characterizations of Jezebel and Ahab, as we will see.

From a materialist perspective of ninth-century Israel, Ahab had good economic and military reasons for desiring this prime piece of real estate. The Jezreel Valley was known, first and foremost, as a rich agricultural region. Even in the Late Bronze Age, the annals of Thutmose III described a harvest of 207,300-plus sacks of wheat, besides forage, from the areas around Megiddo (Wilson 1969, 238). A large spring ('Ein Jezreel) supplied a constant source of water. Furthermore, the area had access to the major highways of the time, such as the Via Maris (Way of the Sea) and one leading from Megiddo to Beit Shean. The city also served as the northernmost point on the local highway, the Way of the Patriarchs, that connected the northern valleys with the central mountain cities of Shechem, Samaria, Bethel, and Jerusalem (Cline 2000; Grabbe 2007; Ebeling, Franklin, and Cipin 2012). These various routes suited Ahab's interests in maintaining good relations with his international trading partners. His marriage to Jezebel facilitated his economic and political alliances with Phoenicia, his neighboring partner to the north.

Besides being located in a rich agricultural area, Jezreel was also an important military center. The archaeology of the site reveals a large case-ment enclosure, similar to an Assyrian structure, Fort Shalmaneser, whose military function was well known. The chapters before and after this story deal with Ahab's war with the Aramaeans (1 Kgs 20; 22). Ahab most likely wanted Jezreel as an agricultural and military base to feed and house his sizable cavalry and chariot units. The location was ideal for assembling, outfitting, and dispatching troops to fight in Aram and in the Transjordan (Aster 2012, 37-39). Barley, an important part of the diet of warhorses, was cultivated in the eastern part of the Valley of Jezreel (Ussishkin 2007, 301-2). Horses can consume ten times more grain than humans on a daily basis, even more during times of war, and this too needed to be extracted

from the rural sectors, along with the huge food quotas for human tables (see 1 Kgs 4:27-28). According to the Kurkh monolith, Ahab possessed enough horses (4,000–6,000) to pull two thousand chariots in a campaign against the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (Cantrell 2011, 36). His concern in 1 Kgs 18:5 to provide watering holes and grasses to keep his horses and mules alive, rather than provisioning his own starving people during the three-year drought, is thus quite plausible. What little arable land and water to be had during this drought was thus diverted from food production for the people to pastureland for Ahab's vast number of animals.

Therefore, in both the narrative of Naboth's vineyard and in the Japanese internment, military necessity and economic greed for agricultural land allegedly dictated the course of events: the unlawful seizure of land, on the one hand, and the criminal removal of people from the land, on the other.

I did not find any deliberate illegal confiscations of Japanese American land during their United States internment that would have been comparable to Jezebel's illegal confiscation of Naboth's vineyard, primarily because Japanese Americans usually did not own land at the time.<sup>4</sup> However, upon entering World War II, the financial assets of many Japanese were frozen and taken over by the US government. Those who had money in Japanese-owned banks no longer had access to their funds. Business transactions between the two countries ceased, because the United States was at war with Japan (Ng 2002, 14). For the evacuation itself, a Civil Control Station supposedly provided "services with respect to the management, leasing, sale, storage or other disposition of most kinds of property including: real estate, business and professional equipment, buildings, household goods, boats, automobiles, livestock, etc." ("Instructions to All Persons of Japanese Ancestry" 1942). Nevertheless, when the incarcerated returned to their property in 1945, they often were deprived of their possessions by being cheated out of them by the so-called friends who held them, or forced to dispose of them cheaply to scavengers and speculators, or left with no alternative but to abandon them (Robinson 2001, 249; cf. Niiya 2020).

Although the Supreme Court never ruled that the removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans was unconstitutional, historians

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4. However, I did discover that the Anglican Canadian diocese of New Westminster sold two churches in Vancouver of Japanese Canadian parishioners while they were interned. The Council of General Synod publicly acknowledged the racism and injustice to these parishioners only recently, on 14 March 2013. See Sison 2013.

and political analysts have described the violations that they believe have occurred (Yamamoto et al. 2001). A “Summary of Constitutional Rights Violated” (2011) can be found on the website of the Japanese American Citizens League. According to Amendment XIV Section 1, of the Bill of Rights:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law, which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. (1868; see “Bill of Rights and Later Amendments” 1995)

Japanese Americans were singled out primarily on the basis of race and national ancestry with no due process under the law, and the government failed to compensate them for their loss of property when they were evacuated under such short notice. Only with the passage more than forty years later of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 was there a national apology and a \$20,000 compensation from the US government given to surviving Japanese American detainees for their traumatic ordeal (Ng 2002, 108–10).

Furthermore, my former Chinese American colleague Patrick Cheng, who is a lawyer as well as a systematic theologian, directed me to a legal doctrine called regulatory taking. This is defined by Wikipedia as “a situation in which a government regulates a property to such a degree that the regulation effectively amounts to an exercise of the government’s eminent domain power without actually divesting the property’s owner of title to the property” (“Regulatory Taking” 2020). In other words, the government does not have to physically seize property in order for it to be considered a taking. The article also goes on to say, “Governmental land-use regulations that deny the property owner any economically viable use are deemed a taking of the affected property.” I am not a lawyer, but it seems that a similar argument can be made that the internment deprived Japanese Americans of the economic use of their land or property by sequestering them from it and that this action can be considered a governmental taking of property that required compensation. I therefore think that the illegal seizure of land and property by governing bodies is a commonality in both the Naboth story of 1 Kgs 21 and the Japanese American experience of internment.

## Ahab and Jezebel

Besides reading 1 Kgs 21 in light of the Japanese internment, the characters of Ahab and his queen, Jezebel, offer other avenues in which to pursue an Asian American reading of the passage. The demonization of Jezebel in 1 Kgs 21 as a foreign woman has parallels with the Dragon Lady stereotype that has plagued Asian American women.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, the satirical disparagement of Ahab's manhood finds similar analogues in the construction of Asian and Asian American masculinity.

We are introduced to Jezebel in 1 Kgs 16:31 as the daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, who entered into a political marriage with Ahab, son of the powerful Israelite king Omri. Next, we discover her "killing off the prophets of the LORD," while 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the goddess Asherah ate at her table during Israel's divinely ordained three-year drought (18:4, 13, 19). The text implies that her group of foreign freeloaders enjoyed the rare consumption of food while the rest of the nation starved. After Elijah slaughtered the prophets of Baal following their encounter on Mount Carmel (18:40), Jezebel, speaking for the first time in the narrative, issued a death sentence against Elijah, who fled for his life. Jezebel probably did not intend to kill Elijah, which would have made him a martyr. Rather, her death threat was a clever tactic to make him flee, because this would have compromised his victory on Mount Carmel (Merecz 2009). The portrayal of Jezebel delineated so far is of a ruthless, cunning, and idolatrous foreign queen.

With this characterization in mind, we thus arrive at the focus of this essay: 1 Kgs 21:1-16. In good company with other scholars who see a break between verses 16 and 17, this essay confines itself to 1 Kgs 21:1-16 (see Cronauer 2005, 116.) After Ahab's abortive attempt to buy Naboth's vineyard, Jezebel encounters a "resentful and sullen" Ahab, lying on his bed and not eating (21:4). Being "resentful and sullen" (סר וזער) seems to be a signature feature of Ahab's personality (see 20:43). After hearing the reason for his depression, her exclamation in 21:7, אתה עתה תעשה מלוכה על-ישראל, can be translated as a question, "Do you now govern Israel?" (NRSV), or as an assertive, "Now you will exercise kingship over Israel!" Or it can be read sarcastically, "Some king of Israel you make!" (NJB). In

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5. *Dragon lady* is a stereotype of a strong, sexually seductive, duplicitous Asian woman. See below.



light of the following discussion, this last rendering is to be preferred. In contrast to her sulky royal spouse, Jezebel proclaims, using the emphatic first-person pronoun, “*I* [אני] will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite” (21:7). *She* will accomplish what her impotent husband cannot.

Taking charge, Jezebel writes letters in Ahab’s name, fastening them with his seal and sending them to the elders and nobles who live with Naboth in Jezreel. She orders them to proclaim a fast, seat Naboth at the head of the assembly, have two good-for-nothings falsely accuse Naboth of cursing “God and king,” and then take him out to be stoned (21:8-14). After she hears about the successful outcome of these events, Jezebel proclaims to Ahab, “Go, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive but dead.” Ahab then goes down and takes possession of the vineyard (21:15-16).

First Kings 21 depicts Jezebel as the main actor of the narrative, wielding considerable authority in her position as queen. She does not hesitate to write in Ahab’s name and use his seal. The elders and the nobles obey her commands without hesitation, even when they include framing an innocent person and having him put to death. Moreover, Ahab does not reprimand her for acting in his name and appropriating his royal seal, nor is there any suggestion that her exercise of power is restricted to this one instance. She is presented as an active partner in her husband’s rule, and a cold-blooded one at that. Nevertheless, while portraying Jezebel as a royal force to be reckoned with, the author simultaneously represents the actual king as an ineffectual leader who could not acquire the vineyard in the first place and sulks about it like a child in his bedroom, provoking his spouse to deride his masculinity, “Some king of Israel you make!”

The ensuing depictions of Jezebel enlarge on this portrait. According to the Deuteronomist, Jezebel urged her husband on to do what is evil in God’s sight so that there is no other king like him in Israel (21:25). She is accused of “whoredoms and sorceries,” promoting the sexual/religious apostasies of the cult of Baal and Asherah in Israel (2 Kgs 9:22). Even when confronting her imminent demise, she exhibits dramatic flair. After adorning her head and painting her eyes, she meets on her own terms Jehu, who has slaughtered her family and is coming after her (9:30). If she is going to her death, she will go as a woman aware of her sexual power. She stands defiantly at the window as queen mother, as other royal women in the Bible have done (Judg 5:28; 2 Sam 6:16). Her depiction at the window may allude to her patronage of the god-



dess Asherah, whose prophets she underwrites, or may even be her symbolic incarnation as the goddess, whose worship Jehu tries to eradicate through Jezebel's death (Ackerman 1998, 160–61; Everhart 2010, 689–92; McKinlay 2004, 88–90). She taunts Jehu with fighting words: "Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?" (2 Kgs 9:31).<sup>6</sup> However, she dies a disgraceful death, thrown from her window by her faithless harem eunuchs. Even so, her assassinator, Jehu, grudgingly acknowledges that, as a king's daughter, she should be buried (9:32–34). Nevertheless, fulfilling Elijah's prophecy (1 Kgs 21:23), dogs consume most of her body before it can have an honorable burial. In a wordplay on her scribally distorted name from זבל ("nobility") to זבל ("dung"), her corpse "shall be like dung [דמן] on the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say, 'This is Jezebel'" (2 Kgs 9:35–37; Gray 1970, 551).

Much has been written about the dating and redaction of the Elijah/Elisha narratives, and the Naboth's vineyard story in particular. A number of scholars argue that the traditions about Naboth in 2 Kgs 9:25–26 are earlier than those in 1 Kgs 21:1–16 (Cronauer 2005; Rofé 1988, 101–2; White 1994, 69). They especially point out that in the former the crime of murder is Ahab's alone, while in the latter Jezebel is its instigator. Even the earliest tradition, the "Elijah-Naboth fragment" in 1 Kgs 21:17–19a, pins the crime only onto Ahab (Cronauer 2005, 8–9, 174). For these scholars, a later fifth-century author retells the older story, shifting the crime from Ahab to Jezebel, to warn those returning to Yehud of the dangers of mixed marriages with foreign women (Neh 13:23–27; Ezra 9–10). (See Yee 2003, 143–46.)

The person of Jezebel in 1 Kgs 21:1–16 thus becomes an ideological construct for dealing with a perceived fifth-century sociopolitical dilemma. She is identified with comparable foreign women in Israel's social memory (see Num 25:1–3; 1 Kgs 11), but her portrayal has been considerably enlarged. As sexually enticing idolaters, foreign women have been disparaged because they seduce Israel away from Yahweh. Jezebel's Persian-period representation adds ruthless, scheming, and murderous to this stereotype, as additional reasons to avoid foreign women in Yehud. Racial and gender stereotypes of the foreign woman in the biblical text are thus not fixed static ideas that are adopted during a crisis, but are concepts

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6. Zimri assassinated the Israelite king Elah but was only able to hold on to his kingship for seven days (1 Kgs 16:15). Jezebel is thus insinuating that Jehu's own rule will be of short duration.

that undergo a continual formation and reformation as the socioeconomic, political, and cultural interests that underlie them change.

The same is also true of the characterization of Ahab, who obviously was an important powerful Israelite king, a builder of houses and cities (1 Kgs 16:32; 22:39), one who can muster a force of two thousand chariots, ten thousand foot soldiers, and an alliance of twelve kings to engage the Assyrian ruler Shalmaneser III at the battle of Qarqar (853 BCE; Grabbe 2007). Yet, for the Deuteronomist, he becomes the wicked king whose evil becomes the measure by which the later villainous king Manasseh will be condemned (2 Kgs 22:13). He becomes the one who, urged on by his wife, allows her to aggressively accomplish what he himself could not do, while he snivels and pouts in his bed resentful and sullen. We will also see this continual formation and reformation in racial and gender stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans through the course of US history.

### A Chinese American Perspective

Full disclosure: during my undergraduate years in the last century my nickname was “Dragon Lady” and my used Plymouth Duster was named “Dusty Dragon,” because it was painted Earl Scheib green.<sup>7</sup>

I had no idea who Dragon Lady was except that she was Chinese, and so was I in a very predominantly white university. Nor was I aware that Dragon Lady was a negative racist, sexist, Orientalist stereotype. In my tender earlier years, I was susceptible to any image of strong Asian women to help shape my own identity as a Chinese American female in a white dominant culture. This was certainly the case in my attraction to the Chinese woman warrior figure of Mulan.<sup>8</sup> The Dragon Lady appellation highlighted my difference from racial/ethnic others, including whites, in my educational setting.

In order to understand the Dragon Lady and Fu Manchu stereotypes of American Orientalism,<sup>9</sup> one must recognize the construction of Asian

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7. Earl Scheib was the founder of a now-defunct US automobile paint company. The green used to paint his cars was particularly bright, distinctive, and hideous, marking one as working class.

8. I have written about my attraction to the woman warrior metaphor in Judg 4 in a number of articles (Yee 1993; 2006; and, most recently, 2013).

9. Fu Manchu was a villainous fictional character in Sax Rohmer novels, which became an Asian stereotype that arose in the United States during early to middle 1900s, when United States-Asian animosity was at its peak. See below.

American gender, race, and sexuality under white hegemonic masculinity. This construction was deeply rooted in the history of Chinese immigration and their experiences of racism and violence in their settlement here. From the mid-1800s onwards, Chinese arrived in the United States to work in the mines and the transcontinental railroad. Most of them were male, because of xenophobic immigration restrictions in bringing wives and women from China. Antimiscegenation laws barred Chinese men from developing heterosexual relationships with white women. US businesses wanted cheap, plentiful, and hardworking Chinese males as laborers to work in these dangerous occupations but did not want them to settle and breed. With no women around, these men formed bachelor societies, forced to cook, clean, and launder for themselves. When jobs in mining and the railroad diminished and the competition with whites in other industries became fierce, Asian men were relegated to so-called women's work, taking feminized jobs as houseboys or opening restaurants and laundries.<sup>10</sup> "The homosocial elements of the bachelor communities and the domestic practices of men living in them had an emasculating effect on the racial discourse" (Chou 2012, 16). We will see this emasculation in the stereotypes of Asian American males (Chan 2001). The few women who were brought from China were forced into prostitution to service these bachelor societies (Chang 2003, 81–92; Lee 1999, 89–91). The stigma of carnality and prostitution attached to these early women from China eventually evolved into the sexually transgressive figure of Dragon Lady.

#### American Orientalism and the Cultural Yellow Peril

American Orientalism refocused Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1989) of the Middle East by asserting the political, social, and cultural superiority of the United States and European Americans, and the inferiority of the same for Asia and Asian Americans (Leong 2005, 2). Depending on the particular circumstances, American Orientalism constructed Asian men in contradictory and conflicting ways as "asexual, impotent, hypersexed and violent" and Asian women similarly as "obedient, servile, sexually

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10. See Hop Sing on the popular US television series *Bonanza*. Hence the proverbial ethnic slur, "No tickee, no washee."

voracious and cruel.” It did not depict the lives of *real* Asian or Asian American men and women.

Stereotypes of Asian men and women changed to reflect the political realities and racial and gender ideologies of the time in the United States. During the late 1800s the designation Yellow Peril was applied to the influx of Chinese laborers who became a threat to white workers. Japan’s expansion into Asia in 1910 also aroused fears of the Yellow Peril endangering the American way of life. The Yellow Peril was epitomized in two Orientalist cultural icons of the early 1900s.

The first was the beautiful but cruel Dragon Lady, embodied in the first female Asian American film star Anna May Wong (Leong 2005; Prasso 2005, 77–83). In the role that launched her career, *Thief of Baghdad* (1924), she played a duplicitous Mongol slave girl who betrayed the princess she served by assisting an equally villainous Oriental prince who wanted the princess’s hand in marriage. Wong personified the mysterious, exotic, sexually seductive, and dangerous features of Asian and Asian American womanhood depicted in American Orientalism. She went on to star in *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931), which was based on the novel *Daughter of Fu Manchu* by Sax Rohmer, where she plays another beautiful but murderous Asian exotic, Fu Manchu’s illegitimate daughter. Her role in this film was an inspiration for the Dragon Lady in the 1934 Chicago Tribune cartoon series *Terry and the Pirates*, the beautiful but deadly Asian ringleader of the pirates (Prasso 2005, 80).

Dr. Fu Manchu incarnated the Yellow Peril in an Oriental face and male body over a forty-year period of Sax Rohmer novels, radio shows, films, and comics that featured him. Fu Manchu wanted to bring the world under the rule of an Oriental empress “of incalculably ancient lineage, residing in some secret monastery in Tartary or Tibet” (cited in Lee 1999, 115). Besides his desire to bring the world under feminine domination, the alien silken robes and long fingernails of Fu Manchu highlighted his sexual ambiguity, a blend of feminine masochism with sadistic machismo that reflected his racial and gendered background of the Chinese Orient (female) and his Western scientific education (male). The hetero/homoerotic blur of his sexuality was contrasted with the healthy, controlled masculinity of his British nemesis Nayland Smith (Lee 1999, 116–17). Fu Manchu became the model for a similar villain of my youth, Ming the Merciless of the planet Mongo in the *Flash Gordon* television series, which I avidly watched. Like Fu Manchu, Ming the Merciless was a diabolical Oriental male, dead set on conquest. His arch-enemy was the blond all-American hero Flash Gordon (Ma 2000, 3–37).

When Japan attacked China in the 1930s, the Hollywood images of the Chinese changed. Dragon Lady morphed into O-Lan of Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*, the hardworking, long-suffering peasant, played in the film version by the white actress Luise Rainer in yellow-face (1937). Her male film counterpart, spouting fortune-cookie Confucianisms, was the obsequious inscrutable detective Charlie Chan, also played by white actors in yellow-face. Contrasting the threatening Fu Manchu, here was another stereotype of Chinese American males: smart, subservient, feminine, the prototypical model minority. Although he evidently had ten children, his virility was belied by his asexual affect (Chan 2001, 51–72).

The Japanese especially became the villain after their attack on Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941). However, with the rise of evil communist China and the recovery of Japan after World War II, the Japanese became the “good guys.” They were represented visually in films dealing with the deferential Japanese geisha girls who catered to GIs stationed in Japan, such as *Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956) and *Sayonara* (1957). Dragon Lady was transformed into Lotus Blossom: docile, obedient, pampering white men and their bodily needs (Hagedorn 2003; Tajima 1989). Significant was the fact that the lovers of Asian women were only white men, symbolizing another feature of American Orientalism: only white men could have free sexual access to women of color. Lotus Blossom mutated back into Dragon Lady as one of the “dirty yum-yum girls” of Hong Kong’s red-light district, Suzie Wong, in the 1957 novel *The World of Suzie Wong* (film 1960). Reflecting the entanglements of the US war in Vietnam, she reappeared again in the 1978 film *The Deer Hunter* but as a Vietnamese prostitute.<sup>11</sup>

Diverse Asian ethnic groups were thus collapsed monolithically into racial and gendered stereotypes of the Asian other, which were continuously formed and reformed to respond to, as well as reflect, different events and circumstances in US history.

## Back to 1 Kings 21

Jezebel and Dragon Lady share commonalities primarily in their foreignness. They become the exotic female other, threatening male hierarchies

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11. A very helpful documentary tracing the Hollywood depictions of Asian women, correlating them to the events of United States history, is Deborah Gee’s *Slaying the Dragon* (1988). For filmic portrayal of Asian men, see *The Slanted Screen: Asian Men in Film and Television* (2006), available from Films on Demand.

with their beauty, sexuality, ruthlessness, and cruelty. Ahab shares the contradictory images of Asian masculinity. The Deuteronomistic depiction of the wickedness of his rule is similar to the despotism of Fu Manchu and Ming the Merciless. However, in his Persian-period incarnation he is ultimately emasculated by his wife, who carries out the task of seizing Naboth's vineyard, which he could not do himself despite his royal power. In this he is similar to the stereotypes of Asian men feminized by American Orientalism.

### Conclusion

My first Asian American reading of 1 Kgs 21 correlated the illegitimate seizure of Naboth's land by the crown with the "regulatory taking" of Japanese property in the United States during their internment during World War II. Denying the Japanese any economic use of their property was in effect a seizure of it. Like Naboth, the Japanese were accused of treason, even though there was no substantive truth in the allegations. "Military necessity" and desire for agricultural land in both cases formed the basis for the unlawful seizure of land, on the one hand, and the criminal removal of people from the land, on the other.

My second reading of the passage highlighted the stereotypical depictions of Jezebel and Ahab and Asian women and men, as ideological constructs that were formed and reformed in varying ways to respond to the sociopolitical contexts to which they were applied. We saw that despite her unfavorable depiction in the Bible, Jezebel was an imposing woman whose power base was derived from her husband's monarchic rule and from her strong association with the foreign cult that she and her husband supported (1 Kgs 16:31-33; 18:18-19; 21:25-26). In the Persian-period redaction of the story, she became the cruel mastermind behind the murder of Naboth and the confiscation of his vineyard to compensate for her husband's impotence in obtaining it. Their relationship in 1 Kgs 21:1-16 became a cautionary tale, warning the returnees from Persia against marital couplings with the "peoples of the land." Ahab who first offered Naboth a just and fair price for his vineyard became the whimpering child who did not get his own way in his postexilic incarnation. The intent here paints Ahab as one "who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord, urged on by his wife" (1 Kgs 21:25; Cronauer 2005, 168-85). "Resentful and sullen," he was scornfully emasculated by his formidable wife: "Some king of Israel you make!" Jezebel's expansion of the biblical stereotype of

the foreign woman as a shameless, scheming, homicidal female is a characterization that lived on in numerous literary and artistic genres, memorably embodied in the actress Bette Davis as a spoiled, conniving southern belle in the motion picture *Jezebel* (1938).

Dragon Lady has been applied to a number of very powerful Asian women who wielded power alongside their men just like Jezebel, such as Empress Tzu-hsi (Cixi), Madame Chiang Kai-shek, and Madame Nhu (Ngo Kinh Nhu). Moreover, other Asian American women have recuperated and embraced the Dragon Lady appellation to communicate the politicization of their feminist power (Shah 1997). Even I took on the Dragon Lady label in my own identity formation as a Chinese American female in a dominant white society. My second reading demonstrates that stereotypes, both ancient and modern, are not static and monolithic but take on substance and meaning as they are used in different historical situations and by those in diverse social locations of gender, race, class, and sexuality.

### Postscript

During May–June 2015, I was fortunate to participate in the Jezreel Expedition, an archaeological dig in the area whose identification with the biblical Jezreel is commonly accepted. Having never been on an archaeological dig and wanting to join one before my retirement, I chose the Jezreel Expedition for several reasons, first of all because of the excellent reputation of its codirectors, Dr. Norma Franklin and Dr. Jennie Ebeling. I was also good friends with members of the expedition, Dr. Jule Bidmead and Dr. Deborah Appler. Finally, I wanted to experience firsthand the area to which I devoted much historical and archaeological study, not only for this essay but also for one on the narratives of Elijah and Elisha (Yee 2015). I saw for myself why Jezreel was a significant piece of real estate, agriculturally and militarily. I spent many days at the spring of Jezreel (‘Ein Jezreel) washing pottery, knowing that it had supplied life-giving water to the area for thousands of years. The panoramic views of the valley were astounding, underscoring the tel’s strategic importance. I could well imagine the thousands of horses for Ahab’s chariots and cavalry pastured in the area (Cantrell 2011, 53–57). I could also envision Jehu driving his chariot like a madman across the valley plane from Ramoth-Gilead, to confront and eventually assassinate Joram king of Israel at the property of Naboth the Jezreelite, thus avenging Naboth’s death and fulfilling Elijah’s earlier prophecy (2 Kgs 9:16-26; 1 Kgs 21:17-19).



Along with Athalya Brenner and the codirectors, I visited the large ancient winery installation that was recently uncovered in 2013 by the expedition. Because of the difficulty in dating rock-cut installations, the winery may be ninth century (the era of Ahab and Jezebel) but more likely seventh century or Persian period. A modern Israeli winery tested the soil around the winery and found that it was suitable for viticulture. While these vineyards might not have been owned by the Omrides, these archaeological remains and soil results confirm that there were indeed vineyards in Jezreel.

In the photograph, I am sitting on the treading floor where winemakers stomped on grapes over two thousand years ago. I am holding a bottle of Jezreel wine, bottled in the local winery, carrying on the ancient tradition of the area.

Le-chayim!



Photography courtesy of the Jezreel Expedition.



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## Engagement

Steed Vernyl Davidson

The so-called Oppression Olympics hopefully receives less traction in an age of greater acknowledgment of overlapping oppressions. Collaborative projects such as this volume not only stymie the politics of division but, from the perspective of Henry Louis Gates, multiply the margins. Gates suggests that the major threat to the marginalized other comes from the possibility of homogenization that fixes otherness into place. As a result, he proposes “breeding new margins within margins, circles within circles” (Gates 1992, 315). These essays illustrate the thickness of the margins as constructed in part by the Bible and the processes of biblical interpretation. Without privileging any single identity, the essays foreground multiple and even contradictory identities. That those of various margins could not only read—when they are assumed to be without speech, though, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1993, 102) points out, not as a result of “subject-constitution and object-formation” of oppressions such as patriarchy and imperialism—but act metaphysical or, as Vincent Wimbush (2000, 8) insists, “exegetical” has been a tireless claim made by the marginalized readers of the Western canonical Bible. These efforts are more than simply coalition building but rather force multipliers that potentially resist the further marginalization of minoritized voices as well as dismantle the centralized control of biblical interpretation.

Minoritization is, among other things, a narrative of how people are systematically grouped and how those groups are assigned negative meanings. These stories are endless and painful, and as scholars we respond to the demands of our well-being to tell stories. In these essays, storytelling does more than entertain or provide context for interpretation. Recording these narratives is an act of personal as well as communal survival, because they serve as sites of outrage in order to once again insist on a place of belonging in the world. Quite often minoritized biblical scholars wear the

ill-fitting suit made by the incompetent tailor Gates (1991, 747) references. Like that person, we are told to contort our bodies to fit that badly tailored suit and, after years of being misshaped, we learn how to speak up and use our authentic voices. In these essays we tell stories, our personal stories (Song and Yee) as well as stories of intellectual (mis)development (Sandoval and Vaka'uta). We tell our stories in these different ways because we work in a field, as Timothy J. Sandoval points out, not designed for our subjectivity. Consequently, as can be seen in Angeline M. G. Song, we must unlearn not only what instinctively makes sense. Further, as Nasili Vaka'uta also shows, we need to find a different set of questions to ask these biblical texts so they can make sense of other communal experiences or simply be relevant to other experiences.

Multiplied margins require greater dexterity in dealing with multiple identities. As minoritized scholars we move within and out of these identities with varying degrees of success. Arguably, we find greater facility moving among the socially constructed divisions (race, sexuality, ethnicity) than we do accommodating differences within our cultural borders. As a result, our interpretive possibilities can be limited to single issues and, in the process, homogenize our otherness. As Gale A. Yee admits, prying apart layers of identities can be difficult, and therefore we simply own those multiple layers. Such thickness of identities within and without communities and, more importantly, among communities, provides opportunities for expanded interpretation of biblical texts—even owning our layered identities and naming our existence. Are we hybridized identities with all of the problematic histories of that word, or are we, in the more fashionable term, intersectional? Yet even intersectionality à la Kimberle Crenshaw (1989, 161) may not accommodate the layers of identities and experiences better seen by Jasbir Puar (2013, 372) as assemblages. The metaphors we choose, though, invariably seem to make us something less human. Even though we describe commonplace human experiences of navigating socially constructed structures, there seems to be no word in a language that easily captures this human reality.

The failure of language to articulate this shared human experience is also the success of language to foster the divides of minoritization. Forced to write in the modern imperial language of English, we are also compelled to reduce native languages into corruptions, derivatives, dialects, nonrepresentable words, marginalized into italics, parentheses, asterisks, and below-the-line comments. That no one word or language holds what we experience together in this scholarly enterprise makes it surprising

that we all gather around the issue of land in our interpretation of this text. Whether as nostalgia, spiritual connections, or urban gentrification, land forms a common uniting thread in our interpretations. No doubt the commentaries lead us in this direction. But why the emphasis on the land over, say, Naboth, who perhaps could be an indigenous man in Singapore, Aotearoa, or Virginia, or a small bodega owner set upon by developers in Chicago? In our essays we do note the human-land connection, so my question relates more to the fact that a thing rather than people organizes our thinking. Is minoritization such a dehumanizing process that things become a way to redeem ourselves from Aimé Césaire's (2000, 42) thingification?

Undoubtedly, for us as minoritized scholars, literary interpretation is also a social task. Demands for justice in literary texts such as the Bible are not merely abstract ideas but pathways to living and advocating for justice in the lives of people. Traditional biblical studies, however, has neither taught us nor seems concerned to build these paths in the lives of real people. Sandoval suggests that a different set of basic texts in the field will help redress this, texts that are not simply primers for understanding the specific identities but provide different conceptual and theoretical foundations for reality. To the extent that biblical studies relies on abstraction for its own sake or abstraction disconnected from our subjectivities, we will find the field as well as the concerns in the Bible we are inclined to take seriously further cut off from the cause of true justice. Inevitably, the field unwittingly sustains the structures that perpetuate minoritization as a form of oppression. Yet in these essays we are concerned with reading *now* in the way we have been socially constructed. Even though we may label these constructions as oppressive, they define our lives—raced, sexed, gendered, bodied in the ways that we may not have chosen but from which we derive meaning. These multiple expressions are contexts, but they are not simply the bases of contextual readings, since all readings are contextual. Rather, these contexts, identities, assemblages, or colors and shades are the places where texts find meaning and generate new meanings. They are not bounded entities but openings where minoritization becomes a source of productive engagement with the Bible.

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Timothy J. Sandoval

The readings of 1 Kgs 21 offered by Steed Vernyl Davidson, Angeline M. G. Song, Nasili Vaka'uta, and Gale A. Yee, as well as my own essay in this volume, reflect a hermeneutical self-consciousness that is regularly central to minoritized biblical criticism. Like my own essay, the contributions of Song, Vaka'uta, and Yee, for instance, foreground especially factors of context and identity in the work of interpretation. Davidson's essay hardly shuns such concerns but is also, methodologically speaking, a virtuoso postcolonial reading of the story of Naboth's vineyard. Sandoval, Song, Vaka'uta, and Yee all find at points in the literary presentation of the biblical story and its characters points of correspondence with the experiences of contemporary minoritized persons and communities—whether Latinx/Hispanics (Sandoval), Japanese Americans and Chinese American women (Yee), or the Māori of Aotearoa (Song and Vaka'uta). Davidson acknowledges that such points of correspondence can well be drawn by interpreters, but he also focuses on the fate of Naboth's land, which the text never explicitly notes was returned to Naboth's clan. Just as these contributions to the volume reveal a hermeneutical self-consciousness, my reflections on the essays likewise revolve around the hermeneutic contributions and questions that the essays evoke for me.



Song's description of her initial reading of 1 Kgs 21 in the context of postcolonial Singapore and her rereading of the story in Aotearoa is my starting point. Song's account of her reading history was, for me, nothing short of arresting—for at least two reasons. First, it is obviously a vivid example of a basic hermeneutic point: how one's circumstances and identifications—or to use Yee's words, "one's positionality"—can affect interpretation.

Yet Song's account of the development of her reading of 1 Kgs 21 was striking to me in another way too. Whether or not Song herself would ultimately privilege one of her readings of the account of Naboth's vineyard over the other, I did at points sense while reading her essay that she viewed her interpretation of the story from a Māori perspective as superior, if not hermeneutically then ethically, to her reading of it in her Singaporean context. The first reading, she says, was "too idealistic" (see the "A Reimagining of Naboth" section of her essay). Like Song, I too found that the Māori concepts that she and Vaka'uta present in their analyses of 1 Kgs 21 may offer interpreters a path to more profound engagement with the story and its possible meanings. While reading both Song's work and Vaka'uta's essay, I found myself resonating with Song's sentiment about being able to grasp the theological vision associated with Naboth's vineyard without truly integrating it into my understanding. Yet despite the significant impact of engaging readings of 1 Kgs 21 through the different lenses taken up respectively by Song and Vaka'uta, it was Song's first interpretation of the story of Naboth's vineyard in postcolonial Singapore that most fully arrested my interpretive imagination.

As Davidson and Yee, each in their own ways, note, it is not an uncommon interpretive move to focus on Naboth "as the victim of monarchal excess" (Davidson) or to see the story as an indictment of "the unlawful seizure of land ... and the criminal removal of people from the land" (Yee). Indeed, this has essentially been the way I, too, have long interpreted the story. Such a view, however, was not Song's first interpretive inclination. Rather, from her perspective in postcolonial Singapore she initially saw not Ahab's actions, but Naboth's behavior as "inappropriate" within a "hierarchically conscious society." Song thus initially concluded Naboth was a "tactless idealist." Unlike many postindependence Singaporeans, Naboth was unwilling to cede his interests to a perhaps authoritarian government in the name of what some might have regarded as a communitarian ideology necessary for the prospering of the nation and the individuals who comprise it. Readers can themselves decide whether such an interpretation

of Naboth is complicit with Ahaz and Jezebel's land grab, as Davidson suggests the final form of the story in the Deuteronomistic History in fact is. In any case, Song's reading from her particular context in Singapore helpfully points out (1) how the text may symbolically represent and refract complex social and political realities and (2) that a distinct social dynamic of shame should be understood to be at work in the story's account of the interaction between Ahab and Naboth. Both are significant since the encounter is usually explained merely, though rather fully, in psychologizing ways—Ahab responds like a little child who is upset because he does not get his way—rather than in sociological and anthropological terms.

My claim that I do not think one or the other of Song's views of Naboth and Ahab's interaction is necessarily *the* right reading may not surprise most readers of this volume. I can, however, imagine some interpreters of 1 Kgs 21—perhaps some who may be committed to the sort of typical analysis of the passage to which Yee and Davidson allude—to arrive at a different evaluation, one that gives less credence to Song's first reading of Naboth than to her second interpretation. Her first reading might even be described by some as an overinterpretation, an analysis overdetermined by, or too strongly or uncritically read through, her experiences in post-colonial Singapore. By contrast, Song's second reading, though apparently more self-consciously a "reading from" a particular perspective, might be regarded as more correct, since it more obviously aligns with that prophetic, ideological voice in the text that is opposed to royal abuses and failures. If so, I would for the time being simply acknowledge with Jonathan Culler (1992, 111, 113) that such overinterpretation is sometimes "more interesting and illuminating" than "sound" or "moderate" interpretation—the sort of interpretation of texts that I might suggest is usual or typical.

If Song's first reading of the Naboth story counts as an interesting and important overinterpretation, so too might Davidson's claim that the story of Naboth is a "cautionary tale on how to correctly steal land," and hence ultimately complicit with the colonial practice of land appropriation. Davidson, of course, is right that the movement of story inclines toward Naboth's murder rather than the ultimate fate of Naboth's land, which we never learn is rescued from royal annexation. However, it is not difficult to imagine composers and readers of 1 Kgs 21:17–22 (notwithstanding 2 Kgs 9:26) holding the two events together and subsequently assuming some sort of restoration of the vineyard to Naboth's clan would have taken place, even if it is not explicitly mentioned. Though I might quibble with Davidson on this point, his reading, like Song's initial understanding of

the story and the sort of overinterpretation Culler (1992, 114) speaks of, nonetheless and importantly encourages us “to ask questions the text does not encourage one to ask about it.”

A further important feature of the essays in this section of the volume that is also related to the hermeneutic reflection they stimulate is the hybrid character of the contributors’ identities and their interpretations of 1 Kgs 21. Hybridity is, of course, an important term of postcolonial discourse, so it would be hardly surprising if one were to discover the concept at work in Davidson’s essay. He does not actually use the word in his contribution, but the differing impulses of the text of 1 Kgs 21 that he uncovers (toward critique of the monarchy and toward complicity in the seizure of land) might fit well under that analytic rubric. Yee, perhaps more fully than other contributors to this section of the volume, announces her hybrid identity as a biblical scholar and offers two distinct engagements with 1 Kgs 21 that might be mapped to the hybrid identity she describes. Her analysis, which draws connections between Naboth’s story and the stories of imprisoned Japanese Americans during the Second World War, can be said to reflect solidarity with others who share with her the broad identity of Asian American; her exploration of the Fu Manchu and Dragon Lady stereotypes in light of especially the Bible’s Jezebel character maps more directly to the interconnected construction of gender and ethnic Chinese identities. Hybridity or *mestizaje* is an important concept in my effort to present aspects of Latinx interpretation as well, while Song and Vaka’uta, two ethnically non-Māori persons living and reading in the context of Azotorea, also make clear the importance of their hybrid identities for their interpretations of 1 Kgs 21.

The contributors’ articulation and embrace of their hybrid, minoritized identities and readings is thus a significant characteristic of these essays. The essays do not merely offer, to borrow some Ricoeurian terms, an “explanation” of the text of 1 Kgs 21 via this awareness and embrace. They also hold out to readers the possibility of new understanding of a well-known Bible story, by means of which readers can also come to articulate fresh truths about ourselves and our world (see Ricoeur 1976).

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Angeline M. G. Song

The tapestry of understanding is not woven by one strand alone.

This saying by well-respected Māori elder and personal friend Kukupa Tirikātene can, I suggest, be appropriated to describe this volume of essays and what it is attempting to do: *create a tapestry made up of diverse yet interwoven strands of minoritized voices, so that a new pattern eventually emerges, even as each strand remains distinct*. I engage with my fellow contributors' essays with this imagery in mind.

Gale A. Yee's personal approach resonates, particularly her sharing of Asian American parallels regarding illegal acquisition of land and her reading of Jezebel in light of the Asian American Dragon Lady stereotype. I am also (partly) Chinese and female, and my recently deceased aunt, who lived through the Japanese occupation of Singapore during World War II, long held feelings of antipathy toward the Japanese, even after she emigrated with me to New Zealand. As with Yee's essay, the value of issuing a reading from a personal vantage point—a stance I, too, frequently adopt—is that new currency is breathed into an ancient text, and a certain empathic rapport often develops between text and reader.

Such personal disclosure is not the easiest stance to assume, however, and I am grateful for Yee's articulate expression of the complexity of issuing a racially/ethnically focused interpretation, due to the complex hybridity inherent in each of our minoritized identities.

In addition, I discovered that as a biblical critic with a postcolonial consciousness, I felt compelled, almost, to include a Māori perspective in my (racially/ethnically) Peranakan reading, since Aotearoa New Zealand is my current context and the Māori are the indigenous people of this land.

On the other hand, I did not wish to encroach on the Māori's narrative space in any way. While working on my essay, I agonized about whether, by incorporating a Māori point of view, I would be engaging in a form of colonizing or inappropriately using the cultural capital of the Māori. Racially speaking, since I am not Māori or *tangata whenua* ("people of the land"), I am regarded as *tauiwi*, variously translated as "stranger," "foreigner," or "new person." Ultimately, I decided to adopt the strategy of juxtaposing my own real life Naboth-parallel story with that of my Māori

friend Colenso's, thus enabling me to *indirectly* incorporate a Māori perspective in my project.

In view of the above, therefore, I appreciate Nasili Vaka'uta's essay for going where I had feared to tread. Vaka'uta, although not a Māori himself, unabashedly adopts a Māori reading lens—and offers thoughtful reasons for doing so, before proceeding to generate a robust, theoretical framework for a Māori reading. Although Vaka'uta and I both live in Auckland, neither of us knew beforehand what the other's essay was about, so it was encouraging for me to later discover that he too had felt it vital to incorporate a Māori perspective in his minoritized reading. Still, the jury is out for me regarding one's right to issue a reading lens from and for another minoritized group.

With regards to methodology, I found Timothy J. Sandoval's discussion of the quandary often faced by minoritized critics pertinent. In particular, I shared Sandoval's excitement that a critical yet creative adaptation of the concepts of *en conjunto* and *lo cotidiano*—one that extended even into the form through which the interpretation would be presented (and printed)—could provide a way forward for Latinx and Hispanic hermeneutics in particular and minoritized biblical criticism in general.

Unlike the other four essays, Steed Vernyl Davidson's essay seems to deemphasize a racial/ethnic slant and prioritize postcolonial criticism. In my view, his essay demonstrates what a thoroughgoing postcolonial critique of a biblical text looks like. However, the project also left me (again) pondering the question of what constitutes minoritized criticism. What is the role of postcolonial criticism in a racial/ethnic minoritized reading? Could an overemphasis on race/ethnicity cause a minoritized critic to overlook certain postcolonial concerns? Should minoritized criticism privilege mostly theory and methodology, or readings that attempt to encapsulate the spirit of minoritization, as with my essay? Not least, is it appropriate for a minoritized critic to adopt the reading lens of another minoritized and/or indigenous group?

In one of our many conversations, Kukupa had related to me how, having been invited by directors of a museum in the United States to hold a Māori exhibition, he and the other Māori organizers had insisted that the First Nations people, or what Kukupa called "the locals," be the ones to welcome the Māori. In his words, Kukupa added that "the (mainly white Caucasian) museum organizers were shocked at our request, but we insisted." Eventually, a group of First Nations women issued a traditional welcome at the opening ceremony, and the Māori women in Kukupa's

group responded to that welcome. I was so impressed by Kukupa's story that I hastily wrote down what he had told me that day (June 19, 2015) in his own words: "Some of the First Nations people had tears in their eyes. It took a small country like New Zealand to recognize the *tangata whenua* of a big country like America."

As a postcolonial minoritized biblical critic, I would like my work to reflect a similar empathy with the indigenous Māori in my present context. However, Kukupa and the First Nations people are both the indigene in their current contexts, and I am not.

Perhaps light will be shed on the matter further down the road. I for one will closely follow the pattern(s) that emerge(s) in this tapestry of minoritized biblical criticism, for this kind of meaning-making is not just an academic exercise for me; it has implications for my everyday life.

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Nasili Vaka'uta

The word *pakipaki* is a Tongan term that literally means "to break into pieces." Breaking here is driven by a need to share rather than to destroy. Sharing presupposes on the one hand *scarcity*, and on the other hand *solidarity*. When something is scarce (especially food), it is expected to be shared equally among the members of a group (family, friends, etc.). That act of sharing in itself is an expression of solidarity! *Pakipaki* is solidarity!

There are at least three settings in which the word *pakipaki* is uttered or used for reference. First is during mealtime. No person is allowed to have the lion's share; everyone is entitled to a piece of the pie (or taro!). The logic here is: there are enough resources, though scarce, for everybody; we just have to manage them wisely and break them evenly.

The second setting is a religious one, the Christian Holy Communion. When the Communion bread is broken into small pieces for the congregants, *pakipaki* is used. Breaking bread is *pakipaki*. Here, a diverse group of people share one bread united by their faith. Brokenness in this case accentuates the idea of *solidarity*.

The third setting also has a religious link, the *kulupu pakipaki* ("breaking group"), which is the name used with reference to groups of people (mostly men) who, on a weekly basis, gather to read, interpret, and discuss (and sometimes argue about) scriptural texts (especially those assigned for the coming Sunday). These people meet to break scriptures into pieces, break up scriptures, break into scriptures, and, in some cases, break away from scriptures. This *pakipaki* reading gives every member of the group an

opportunity to *paki* (“share”) one’s understanding of a text. It nurtures freedom of reading as participants can offer a subversive take on a text. They do this not just to get a better understanding of what they are reading, but also to acknowledge that no single viewpoint is sufficient. Interpretation, in this case, is a collective task, and meanings of texts are mutually created. *Pakipaki*, therefore, is interpretation with a communal edge!

That is the edge this section of the volume offers to biblical scholarship. Together, we perform a *pakipaki* on 1 Kgs 21. One text is broken up, into, and away from by a group of biblical scholars who, despite their cultural and geographical differences, stand together as minoritized critical readers. In doing so, they shed more light on an ancient biblical narrative with a violent and imperial orientation. That is the problem raised by Steed Vernyl Davidson’s postcolonial reading (Davidson’s *paki*), which pays attention to how colonialist ideas are distorted to appear as anticolonialist rhetoric. Rather than viewing the narrative as a celebrated relief from this discourse of conquest, Davidson’s *paki* shows how the narrative participates in and furthers such a discourse.

Timothy J. Sandoval’s piece calls attention to two orientations of Latinx engagement with scriptures: reading *en conjunto*, together, with each other, in community; and reading *lo cotidiano*, from the everyday experience. As this serves as his mode of and frame for interpreting 1 Kgs 21, Sandoval seeks to displace and decenter the dominant mode of reading; in his words, “to get it to ‘*hacerse más allá*,’ to move over a bit more.” This mode of reading resonates with the idea of *pakipaki* mentioned above.

Gale A. Yee’s *paki* adds another unique—that is, an Asian American—perspective to the reading of 1 Kgs 21. First of all, she juxtaposes the Naboth narrative with the illegitimate seizure of land and property of Asian Americans by drawing on the history of the regulatory taking of Japanese property in the United States during the Japanese internment of World War II. Like Naboth, Americans of Japanese ancestry were accused of treason, even though there was no substantive truth in the allegations. Second, Yee also highlights the stereotypical depictions of Jezebel and Ahab alongside women and men of Asian heritage as ideological constructs that were formed and reformed in varying ways to respond to the sociopolitical contexts to which these constructs were applied.

At this point of the *pakipaki*, Angeline M. G. Song enters with her layered considerations of 1 Kgs 21, which she locates between the place of her birth and upbringing, Singapore, and her current place of residence, Aotearoa New Zealand; between her experience as a person with Peranakan (of



mixed Malay and Chinese ethnicities) ancestors, who had to give up their inherited land due to the Land Acquisition Act of 1966, and the experience of Māori in regard to colonial land grabbing in New Zealand. From that hyphenated space, Song offers an intriguing and careful reading of the text. Here she invites the readers to focus not only on the injustice that happened to Naboth but also the ideology that drives it. She digs further beneath the surface of the narrative to retrieve lost characters and voices, that is, those of the workers at Naboth's vineyard. She argues that when Naboth stood up and said no to the king's takeover of his land, he was also standing up for the livelihood and rights of his unnamed workers.

At this point of the *pakipaki*, I return to my reading of 1 Kgs 21 through the lens of *whenua*. Like Song, I (a Polynesian reader) positioned my reading in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand to show epistemological solidarity, and for that reason alone. There is no pretension to speak on behalf of Māori. The similarities between Māori understanding of land and those of Naboth, as well as between the views of Ahab and colonizers, are significant. To shift the focus from Naboth and the violence he suffered only serves the interests of those who value land ownership above the well-being of those who are rightful custodians. It's *whenua*—it is where people stand (*turangawaewae*)! Here ends my *paki*!

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Gale A. Yee

The essays of Timothy J. Sandoval, Angeline M. G. Song, and Nasili Vaka'uta, like mine, all primarily focus on the social location of the interpreter in analyzing the story of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kgs 21. In contrast, Steed Vernyl Davidson's approach to the passage is methodological, choosing postcolonial criticism to tackle the story. I first outline the different ways in which the social locations of the reader are approached by the four authors and then make some comments about Davidson's methodological reading.

Sandoval highlights the practices of theological, ethical, and biblical interpretations in Christian Latinx communities *en conjunto* ("together with each other" in community) and *lo cotidiano* (in the context of everyday experience). One of the things that can bond Latinx Americans together with each other is that they mostly share the same language. Speaking from my own social location, I wonder whether this bonding is possible among Asian Americans, given that we speak different languages, and even if we supposedly do speak the same language, their different dialects



are often not intelligible to the other, as was the case of the Cantonese- and Mandarin-speaking students I met in Hong Kong. We are from many different ethnically diverse countries, lumped together under an umbrella term, Asian Americans. Our social locations have been characterized by our “heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity” (Lowe 1996, 60–83). Can we as a social group and in our biblical interpretation be *en conjunto* as Latinx Americans are called to be?

Song’s interpretation of 1 Kgs 21 is affected by her personal experiences of the legal situation in postcolonial Singapore. Naboth’s abrupt rejection of Ahab did not permit the king to save face, which is an important aspect of being Asian. Song offers a detailed commentary before analyzing the text, detailing her adoption by a Pakeha woman, socialization as a British subject, her personal experiences with land grants and agreements, and her move to New Zealand and her friendship with a Māori, who like Naboth rejected offers to purchase his land. This land was his standing place. Not knowing her biological racial-ethnic origin as an adoptee, Song self-identifies as Peranakan, the Malay Chinese ethnicity of her adoptive mother. She notes that, under colonization by the British, Peranakans had lost many cultural features usually associated with ethnic Chinese and that, because of this colonization, many strived to be more British. Song relates how she herself absorbed this colonial worldview as a first generation of citizens of the new Republic of Singapore. Song’s worldview changed when she became friends with indigenous Māori folk and saw their own high regard for their ancestral land.

Applying these experiences to an interpretation of 1 Kgs 21, she rejects her initial reaction to Naboth’s refusal of Ahab’s request for purchase of his vineyard and reads his refusal through the lens of her Māori friend’s spiritual understanding of land, which resisted colonial attempts to buy it. My concern with Song’s essay is that her interpretation deals only with a small part of the text, namely, Naboth’s refusal to accept Ahab’s offer. Exactly how the wealth of detail regarding Peranakans, British colonization of Singapore, Song’s own experiences of both, and so on was relevant to this refusal remains unclear. The essay did not go into the reasons Naboth *himself* gave for his refusal, nor did it deal with anything else of the narrative. Even if Song did not want to deal with historical Levitical laws regarding the alienation of his clan’s property, the text itself offers a literary reason for Naboth’s refusal. I wish that Song was more historically and literarily grounded in the text at hand. Her neglect of history leads her to imagine Naboth’s vineyard workers and make some historical assumptions about

them. These interesting assumptions are simply asserted and not argued. Song would have a stronger case if she incorporated them with knowledge about the economics of royal extraction of labor in ancient Israel (Yee 2017).

Vaka'uta was more effective than Song in reading 1 Kgs 21 through Māori eyes, even though, like Song, he is not Māori but a native of Tonga. Vaka'uta is clear in his methodological approach, providing the questions he asks as a contextual reader through the eyes of racial/ethnic colonized others. He effectively details the Māori notion of *whenua* land, which signifies more than the dry ground on which one walks. *Whenua* is a living, female source of life that creates intimate connections among its people and with the divine. Land is a source of spiritual power, providing a standing place where one can find home.

With this background Vaka'uta then turns to an analysis of 1 Kgs 21 in its entirety. Read through Māori eyes, Ahab resembles the colonial land grab in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Vaka'uta correlates different aspects of the narrative with the Māori understanding of *whenua* land. His interpretation is a call to Aotearoa biblical scholars to move away from Eurocentric interpretive ways or risk becoming irrelevant in their Aotearoan context.

Davidson's postcolonial reading of the Naboth vineyard story is intriguing in how it interprets the story as furthering colonial ideas in a seemingly anticolonial narrative. This was a new reading of the story for me. Davidson situates the story within the larger epic of the Deuteronomistic History, itself an overt depiction of conquest and colonization. Ahab and Jezebel are negatively painted as colonizers, and Naboth as the indigenous victim. Elijah's condemnation of Ahab and Jezebel's seizure of land seems like an anticolonial action. However, Elijah hardly focuses on this overreach of colonial power. His denunciation of Ahab is vague, with no direct reference to Ahab's procurement of the land through murder. Davidson argues that a postcolonial reading unmasks the colonialist discourse in 1 Kgs 21 in which the negative characterizations of Ahab and Jezebel divert attention from their usurpation of the Naboth's land.

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## John 4



## Reading John 4 from Away

Ronald Charles

The introduction to Jesus's meeting with the Samaritan woman in John 4 starts with a rumor: the Pharisees have heard that Jesus is gaining and baptizing more disciples than John (John 4:1). The narrator assures us that, in fact, it is not Jesus who is baptizing but his disciples (4:2). The next bit of information we have is that Jesus has to go through Samaria (4:4). From now on, the narrator gives a series of information pertaining to cultural history (4:5, 9, 12, 20), ethnicity (4:22), conflict (4:9b), time (4:6b, 21, 23), and gender positionality (4:27). I argue in this paper that the introduction to the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman is key to understanding the unfolding dialogue between the two characters.

There is in the encounter a clear demarcation of "we" and "you." We signify salvation: "We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews" (4:22b), whereas *you* imply ignorance: "You Samaritans worship what you do not know" (4:22a). The Johannine Jesus thus embodies the national Jewish side, while the Samaritan woman represents the ignorant, the female, and the other. This picture resembles, strangely, the encounter of a Spanish colonizer named Nicolás de Ovando with Queen Anacaona in the island of Ayiti, in the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The plan I follow in this essay is as follows. I begin by situating John 4 in its immediate context. I then go on to place the encounter of Nicolás de Ovando—the island's governor—with Anacaona in parallel with that of Jesus and the Samaritan woman. I conclude by showing how the trope of we and you is problematic and why it is important to problematize our reading of the text. I engage this text as a flesh-and-blood reader in my diasporic social location as a minoritized scholar, and I experiment in trying to engage the narrative as if reading it for the first time (see, among others, Smith-Christopher 1995; Sugirtharajah 1999; West 2007). I use an autobiographical method in this paper (see, among others, Staley

1995; Anderson and Staley 1995; Davies 2002). In a scholarly article it is the expected norm that one engages with other works of scholarship. However, in this paper, I am deliberately bracketing most other scholarship and focusing on my own experience in reading. I proceed thus as an experiment in my own writing with the least amount of citations possible. I admit that it is not really possible for me to be a naive reader who has not been influenced by the many readings I have done. However, the goal is to explore my own story and the history of where I am from in the act of reading this text. In this process, I move as if walking alone through the maze of the narrative we encounter in John 4.

I am a Haitian Canadian living now in the northeastern part of Nova Scotia, Canada, in a small University town called Antigonish. This is a place where anyone who is not born here, and whose ancestors are not Scots or Irish from the town or the county, is automatically categorized as being "from away," that is, out of place, never fully belonging, regardless whether one is a Canadian of several generations. Such a demarcation is not without irony. In effect, the occlusion of the Mi'kmaq, the first inhabitants of the land, the ones the Scots cannot reference in this discourse about coming from away, is interesting to notice, because then the Scots themselves would necessarily be coming from away as well. Nevertheless, its hold is clear and affects me.

My social location, then, is of one "from away" at different levels. These markers and more mean: I am black; I grew up in Haiti; I spent thirteen years in Toronto; I have an accent that differs from most local residents; and I am approaching this text of John as a reader from away. I am a reader from away in the sense that I am using this particular status to mean something closer to critical distance, even if that critical distance is partly supplied by my social location. At any rate, the exclusionary, colonialist discourse about coming from away found here in Antigonish is not what I am talking about.

I use being "from away" in the sense of being away from my world in Port-au-Prince, where I was not confronted with a world where one had to sit at the same table with others and be frank with one another. Reading from away also means reading away from one's zone of comfort, somewhat of a reading against the grain. From away presupposes reading with the knowledge that doing this kind of disturbing analytical evaluation of texts can push one away from one's family members, who do not quite understand what one is talking about. This reading away from home means being pushed away from friends with whom one grew up. Reading from

away with tears in the eyes, being torn apart, questioning everything, and, yet, still holding on to the mystery of worship, of prayers, of fellowship, of community, is not easy. Yet, this is exactly the kind of exhilarating reading that liberates me. Being a skeptic at one moment and being blown away by a majestic presence at another instant, having faith and doubts, being a schizophrenic and living in different worlds, is disturbing yet beautiful. Being a reader in pain; a reader in joy; a reader who searches honestly and rigorously; a reader who struggles and accepts limitations as a finite being but who finds solace in the beauty of nature, in music, in poetry, in silence; a reader who knows how fragile everything is—this is a posture in life that can be overwhelming, yet extremely satisfying. This is the reader I am—or maybe the reader I strive to be—as I read John 4 from away.

### John 4 in Its Immediate Context

John's first chapter is overwhelming. The reader is struck by the presentation of this "Word who became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14).<sup>1</sup> John presents Jesus as one who is greater than his forerunner (1:26–27). Jesus is the one on whom the Spirit descends (1:33); he is declared to be a rabbi, the son of God, the king of Israel (1:49). After such a grand presentation of Jesus, the reader is not totally surprised when Jesus changes water into wine (2:1–11). That is the first sign in a series of six undisputed ones (2:1–1; 4:46–54; 5:1–15; 6:1–15; 9:1–41; 11:1–44) to be performed in order to consolidate the hero's identity and to point the reader to faith in Jesus. The tantrum this divine figure experiences, resulting in scattering the coins of the moneychangers and overturning people's tables in the temple (2:13–16), is a bit odd. The rationale is somewhat understandable for a prophet who wants to restore things to their ideal state. However, the answer Jesus provides for the legitimacy of his actions is not clear: "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (2:19). The narrator tries to explain the response by adding: "But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken" (2:21–22). The transition to the next episode is that "He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man" (2:25).

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1. All English translations from the Greek are my own unless indicated otherwise.

The conversation between Jesus and a learned Pharisee named Nicodemus in John 3 proves to the reader that Jesus indeed knows everything. He surpasses Nicodemus in knowledge and in wisdom. He speaks of earthly things, yet Nicodemus does not grasp the profundity of his message. How then would Nicodemus believe if Jesus had spoken of heavenly things (3:12)? In the conversation with Nicodemus, the categorization of *we* and *you* is also present. Jesus says to the teacher of Israel: "We speak of what we know, and we testify of what we have seen" (3:11). The interlocutor becomes a collective *you*: "You people do not accept our testimony" (3:11). The reader is puzzled. Is Jesus representing a collective addressing Nicodemus as the representative of another collective entity? Then, the discourse switches back to *I* in the next verse (3:12). Verses 13–20 are a theological explanation given by the narrator regarding this figure from heaven.

The next sequence is also a puzzle and a bit confusing. Jesus and his students go out into the Judean countryside, where he spends some time with them and baptizes (3:22). One is confused because the episode of Jesus talking with the Samaritan woman starts with an attempt at correcting this element of information about Jesus baptizing others in 4:2: "although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples." The matter of baptizing comes up again in 3:25, with the interesting window of an argument that develops between some students of John the Baptist and a certain Jew: "They came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him'" (3:26). The Baptist tries to put any confusion aside: He is not the Christ; he is quite satisfied with his position as a friend of the bridegroom; he must become less, while the one he testified about must become greater (3:30). The theological rationale and themes at the end of John 3 are quite similar to the discourse one hears from Jesus's conversation with Nicodemus in the previous verses. The narrator seems to blend Jesus's tone and insights to that of the Baptist: "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all" (3:31). The purpose of the book is reinforced: this figure is from above; he testifies of what he has seen and heard (3:32); the one whom God has sent speaks the word of God (3:34); the Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands (3:35); and whoever believes in the Son has eternal life (3:36). However, "whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath



remains on him” (3:36). The knowledge of this overwhelming figure from above shapes the introduction to the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman for the reader.

### The Setting of Jesus’s Encounter with the Samaritan Woman

John 4:4 presents the absolute necessity for Jesus to go through Samaria. Verses 5–6 present Jesus as being tired from his journey and coming to a town in Samaria called Sychar. This is an important historical place, laden with cultural memory. The town is situated near the plot of ground the patriarch Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well, an emblematic and significant site, is there, and Jesus sits down by the well. There is in this sense a recourse to an originary past to signify that this land is not really a Samaritan land but belongs to the Jews. The well is Jesus’s ancestor’s well. He belongs to the land; this is the well of his forefathers.

The coming of the Samaritan woman to draw water (4:7) could be read as one coming from away, that is, from a certain distance, to draw water from a well that belongs not to her people but to those of Jesus. Even if she is in the land, the text seems to signify that she should not be there. She is not part of the story of the well. She is nameless; she is a Samaritan; she comes to draw water at the sixth hour of the day without the help or the company of anyone; she has no husband; she cannot really argue with this know-it-all Jewish man from heaven. Her fate is already sealed. She will have to believe.

This is the main argument of the book: “These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31). The reader is confronted with a larger-than-life character who makes demands. Seemingly John does not let his readers simply have access to information about Jesus, or even to learn from him, without having to bow to any of his authoritarian demands. Without further exploring the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, the reader knows well in advance that she does not have any chance to stand up to him, to resist him, to persuade him, to refute his arguments, or to simply say, “No, thank you very much.” She must believe. “He had to go through Samaria” (4:4).

The Samaritan woman should have counted herself lucky to have this Son of God engage in a conversation with her. She is a miserable woman looking for water from a well, while he can provide her with fresh living water. “Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can

you get this fresh running water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his flocks and herds?" (4:11–12). Here she makes a claim to the well, to the land, and to the genealogy. The well is her well; Jacob is her ancestor; it is her story as well. There is no more you versus we; it is one story. We belong together; yet, still, we have chosen to express our identities differently. Jesus engages her, perhaps as a sign of hope. Maybe the wall of separation will be broken down, after all. She is curious: "Are you greater than our father Jacob?" John's Jesus goes back to his grand pronouncements: "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (4:13–14). One recalls that the great doctor Nicodemus could not comprehend the inner/superior meaning of Jesus's words. Now, how will this woman understand the meaning of Jesus's philosophical discourse? She is of good cheer and politely states: "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water (4:15).

The reader, once again, is not surprised when Jesus tells her everything about her love life after her declaration that she has no husband. The woman does not seem too surprised either: "I can see that you are a prophet" (4:19). Gradually, John is showing us how she is being transformed from a state of utter ignorance to that of knowing what the reader knows all along: he is a traveler "from above" who knows everything. Verse 20 reverts to the we-versus-you dichotomy: "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." The Samaritan woman becomes the mouthpiece of one specific group, and she places Jesus in another specific place. Throughout the conversation thus far one is witnessing the representatives of two distinct groups vying for dominance. However, the reader knows well in advance that one side has the upper hand; Jesus is no ordinary Jew. His response to the Samaritan woman has the semblance of moving away from the too-narrow representation of identities and of relationship with God: "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem" (4:21). This declaration seems to go beyond any interpretation of space as being fixed/rigid in order to advocate for something more flexible. Space is not a geographical entity. Having a relationship with God is envisioned in a future time as transcending any sort of rigidity in order to build on relationship. Yet, in the midst of this liberating message, the highly ethnic, if not even chauvinistic, discourse is uttered without reserve by Jesus: *you* are ignorant—you worship what you

do not know; *we* have it—we know what we do know, salvation is from *us* (4:22). However, as if the narrator realizes he is going away from the liberating possibility introduced in verse 21, he moves back to the matter of the upcoming time when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth (4:23). To solidify his point, the narrator, through Jesus's mouth, repeats the constructive insight in verse 24: "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." John seems to be struggling between an ethnocentric message that categorizes the Samaritans as other and a discourse that contemplates the possibility of entering into relationship with God without the barriers of a specific locale.

The Samaritan woman plays the role of a character that helps to advance Jesus's arguments. Her next utterance supplies the narrator with the ingredient he needs for declaring that Jesus is the Messiah and to convince the reader to believe that Jesus is the Christ. The woman then says: "I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes he will explain everything to us" (4:25). John's Jesus is very quick to disclose his identity: "I am, the one speaking to you" (4:26). For the first time in John the reader encounters Jesus self-referencing as "I am." Later on, the reader finds Jesus referring to himself variously as follows: "I am the bread of life" (6:35, 48); "I am the light of the world" (8:12; 9:5); "Before Abraham was, I am" (8:58); "I am the door" (10:9); "I am the good shepherd" (10:11); "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25); "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6); and "I am the true vine" (15:1).

In speaking to the Samaritan woman, Jesus overwhelms her by confirming to her that she does not have to wait any longer for any Messiah to come in order to explain everything to "us." He declares to her that he is the one, although it is not clear from the passage that he has explained everything, or anything, to her. The conversation thus far has not moved far. Jesus seems to have an agenda, but it is not clearly stated. The woman seems to enjoy the conversation, but there is no evidence she has advanced in deciphering who this traveler is and what his purposes are exactly in engaging her in conversation. From her standpoint, he is a Jewish rabbi and a prophet.

The last bit of information Jesus gives her, that he is the Messiah, is quite puzzling. One may imagine this woman asking herself: "How is that possible that he is the Messiah? Is the Messiah not supposed to come at the end of time to put things to right and to deliver us from evil, to get rid of the Romans and establish the kingdom of God?" The reaction of the woman by leaving her water jar and by going back to ask the people of her

town whether this man who has told her everything she ever did could be the Christ is an indication of her confusion. She is puzzled, excited, and keeps on asking questions about this man: “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” (4:29).

Many of the Samaritans from that town came out toward Jesus; they believe in him because of the woman’s testimony: “He told me everything I ever did” (4:39). In this way, the woman becomes a channel by which the people of her town come to Jesus and believe in him. John has achieved his goal: the people are convinced, and they believe in him. “So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And many more believed because of his words” (4:40–41). The reader does not know the essence of Jesus’s words to this particular crowd. From a narrative standpoint they are irrelevant. The text does not clarify whether the people receive an answer with regard to the Samaritan woman’s question concerning Jesus’s messiahship. The crowd is amazed, and many more believe. “They said to the woman, ‘We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world’” (4:42).

One notices quickly John’s tone, argument, and message to his community through the voice of the crowd: believe for yourself, not because of the testimony of another; *we* know who this man is—he is the Savior of the world. John comes back with the theology he exposed earlier about Jesus being the savior of the world (3:16–17). Again, John uses another vehicle—this time, the crowd—to advance his theological agenda. The group John represents (“we”) knows everything about this man, and the reader is confronted to move from ignorance to a recognition of who this man truly is. John’s invitation to the reader is to come to this traveler from above, to stay with him for a little while, and to listen to his words. John seems to be convinced that this alone is necessary to persuade his readers to believe that Jesus is the savior of the world.

The necessity for Jesus to go through Samaria, John seems to indicate, was for Jesus to win the Samaritans. John does not indicate whether Jesus’s ministry among the Samaritans had any positive influence on the tense relationship between Jews and Samaritans. The difficult social relationships between these different ethnic groups, and also between John’s community and other communities he is trying to communicate with, are not addressed. John’s community wants to affirm that they have proper knowledge about this man Jesus, but the nitty-gritty social realities are not within the purview of John’s discourse. John’s Jesus seems to be interested

in disembodied individuals in need of a savior. The Samaritan woman is a nameless woman whose life has been embroiled in many unsuccessful relationships. Jesus knows that. Yet, what seems to be of interest to John's Jesus is not the woman in the totality of herself, but her salvation; theology seems to trump social realities. The flexible identities of the woman indicate she needs more than a Messiah. The people in her town presumably need more than a savior of the world. John does not explicate what this savior does for the Samaritans: How, in concrete social and political terms, does that savior work? How does this text relate to my own social location, or how can one read Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman from one's place?

### Reading in/from One's Place

A reader reading in/from his or her place needs more than a figure that reveals everything one ever did. Life is much more complicated than hearing from a stranger everything one has ever done. How does John's Jesus fare in the social realities of antagonism between Jews and Samaritans, and how do readers who are scattered, marginalized, and oppressed supposed to understand or to react to John's savior of the world? Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman participates in essentializing and homogenizing complex relationships and experiences. John seems to be arguing for simple—if not simplistic—solutions to issues of borders, ethnicities, human behaviors, and beliefs. The Samaritan woman's life experiences are laid out in a pure, one-dimensional way; the sociopolitical aspects of her existence are obliterated in the interest of John's overall theological purposes. Even the vague attempt at contextualizing the encounter ("For Jews do not associate with Samaritans," 4:9) leaves the reader, who reads from away, puzzled about what to do with this story here and now.

Readers reading in/from their place may want to question and problematize the too-clear positioning of this text. Readers occupying different sites, always negotiating identities in flux, of never belonging. Readers being in/from different worlds, not willing to or just being in the impossibility of taking one side over the other, of being both in and out, speaking different languages, being at ease in different cultures. Readers struggling between being a Christian and an agnostic. A reader such as myself, reading Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman in my diasporic social location from away. All such readers may well want to diverge from the

strict reading and response John wants us to adopt. To these kinds of readers, John says: "No! You must believe!"

How does John's discourse prove even slightly helpful to those whose lives are menaced every day? How do countless and nameless women today who are trapped in all kinds of abusive relationships supposed to hear John's message of a savior of the world? How do (or how should) exploited nannies in the urban centers of the West, women refugees, and poor illiterate women in the Global South relate to this encounter? Would knowing and telling them everything about their tormented lives be enough? Are women who have to travel miles and miles in search of water able to meet a Jesus who sits at a well and argue with him for the rights of all to have access to clean water, or would Jesus be John's Jesus, one who is utterly pre-occupied to present himself as the savior of the world? How would John's Jesus respond to women who lost loved ones in the devastating earthquake of 12 January 2010, which destroyed a good part of Port-au-Prince, Haiti?

To ask John's Jesus to save women from my church in Haiti who suffer different types of trauma because of the death of their loved ones would certainly be too much. I know one who has lost a husband; he was in his early thirties. I know two other women from my church. They are no longer in this world; the earthquake took their lives. They also were in their early thirties. I know another woman, again from my church, who has lost her right hand. Beyond the tragedy of the earthquake that destroyed so many lives, I know other women for whom I wonder whether John's Jesus could have a transforming word relevant to them.

I spent a week as a guest in the home of a woman professor in Ukraine. Now I wonder where she is, given the state of affairs of pro-Russian groups in Ukraine. My understanding is that the pro-Russian groups already live in the eastern parts of Ukraine and that they began agitating for safeguards against the new Ukrainian ethnic nationalist government, which in its turn responded with violent repression, thus sparking an uprising (which Vladimir Putin was only too keen to support). I know other women close by in my own family for whom I wonder whether John's Jesus makes any sense. What would be the answer of John's Jesus to one woman, again in her early thirties, who has lost one breast due to cancer? The whole family is praying/hoping that the cancer does not come back. Another woman is depressed; another one has no job; another one wonders whether her husband is faithful to her.

To all of these women in need, one may ask where John's Jesus is. Reading from my place means reading with my eyes wide open in order

to understand the fate of indigenous women here in Canada, who are kidnapped, beaten, and killed simply because of who they are. Reading from my place means not being insensitive to the ways in which John's text can be used to offer simplistic solutions to hard and difficult human questions and experiences.

As a real reader with multiple cultural experiences, I approach the text both as a biblical critic and as a product of the text. John's text informed me as a Christian growing up in Haiti. The incarnate Logos was all I felt I needed in a world out of joint with itself. The grand opening of John, to me, surpassed anything else I was reading in my teenage years. There was something in John that called my attention. The book was intimate, yet out of this world. The book of John seemed to have all the answers I needed when I entered into discussions with Jehovah's Witnesses. Jesus was God; no one can go to the Father but through him. Jesus is exclusive; I am in the right; others who do not believe have Satan as their father (John 8). The meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman showed me how Jesus was a great communicator. He started where the woman was in her understanding and gradually opened himself up to her. He is patient; he goes beyond stereotypes; he talks to a Samaritan woman in the open. Jesus is all we need. This is the kind of devotional reading I did until I went to graduate school.

In graduate school I discovered different Jesuses. In graduate school I lost John. I hardly went back to John, since the focus of my research was Paul. Coming back to John after all these years and reading him as I do now makes me feel strange. I cannot read John the way I used to. Yet, I miss John's Jesus of my teenage years. I miss the tenderness; I miss knowing it all. I miss being able to just read John, or any other biblical text, simply for the nourishment of my soul. I am, however, conserving the memory of my encounter with God through Jesus when I was a teenager in Haiti. As a graduate student in Canada, I questioned—and now after my studies I am still questioning—many things in the Bible and the way in which the biblical text has been used and is being used to manipulate and to make others other. I am really questioning everything, but somehow I feel the need to conserve this theological memory that has shaped me and that led me to undertake biblical studies in the first place.

As I have developed spiritually and intellectually, I have had to deal with the disconnect between, on the one hand, the memories of being encountered and propelled by a God of liberation and, on the other, my awareness of how the text and tradition betray that God and require that I



displace that memory with oppression. I decided to stick with the memory and subject the text to it. The memory is more nurturing than the text for me. I entered biblical studies to know more about the Bible and to serve in my local church in Haiti. My commitments were to a God of justice and liberation. As I immersed myself more into ideological criticisms and realized the presence of oppressive ideologies in the text, I came to the conclusion that to ignore the patriarchal and ethnocentric discourse embedded in the text was to say to my wife, to my sister, and to my mother that their dignity and wholeness were not as important to me and that God is, or can be, captured within a particular book. Theologically, spiritually, and intellectually, this is a construction that my mind cannot hold.

Yet, I do not feel I can reject the Bible in toto. The Bible contains profound and powerful passages that help me understand some of the mystery of human existence. Thus I do my reading of John 4 from away, from a critical distance, as a reader quite aware of how the New Testament texts were (are being) used to justify colonization of the Two-Thirds World. I read the texts with my feet firmly planted on the ground and knowing that these texts have been used (are being used) to legitimize oppressive structures of all sorts (gender, sexuality, class, economics, culture, race, ethnicity, politics, and so on).

Having situated the text in its immediate context and having opened up about my own social and ideological position as a reader interpreting Jesus's encounter with a Samaritan woman, let us now turn to another meeting, that of Nicolás de Ovando and Queen Anacaona in Ayiti in the sixteenth century, in order to draw some parallels and analogies between the two encounters. The purpose of this type of comparative exercise is to show how the trope of "we" and "you" is problematic and why it is important to problematize our reading of the text.

### Reading with Queen Anacaona in Mind

The town of Léogane—where my loving mother is from—was the home of Anacaona, a Taíno *cacica* (chief or ruler). She lived roughly between 1474 and 1504 and ruled over Xaraguá, the richest and largest province of Quisqueya, Ayiti. According to different legends, she was extremely beautiful, well-liked, and respected by her subjects. The inhabitants of Xaraguá lived a very peaceful life, in harmony with nature. Bartolomé de Las Casas (2003, 14–15) describes it this way: "The fourth kingdom was called Xaraguá. This was like the kernel or marrow, or the court of all that island; in



its highly polished tongue and speech, in the courtesy and most orderly and composed breeding of its people, in the number of its nobility and their generosity—because there were many, a great number, of lords and nobles, and in the prettiness and beauty of all the people, it exceeded all the others.”

When the Spanish governor, Nicolás de Ovando, who ruled the island with sixty cavalry and about three hundred infantry men, announced he would come to visit Xaraguá, Queen Anacaona ordered that the streets were to be decorated with flowers and the houses adorned with palms. She organized a grand reception in honor of the governor and his soldiers. Ovando was satisfied with the reception he received, and he suggested “that he and his Spanish compatriots organize a ‘European’ celebration, a kind of military review. The Queen accepted without hesitation. The Indian caciques, full of curiosity and with no undue alarm, went to the warrior party” (Cyprien 1999, 18).

Over three hundred lords and nobles went out to him when he called them, promising them no harm. However, “he commanded that most of those lords be put by deceit and guile into a very large house of straw, and when they were closed up within, he ordered that the house be set a-fire and those lords and nobles be burned alive” (Las Casas 2003, 15). Queen Anacaona was captured and put in chains. She had the choice to become a concubine of one of the Spaniards, but she chose death alongside her people. Las Casas adds: “And then they rushed upon all the others and put an infinite number of people to the sword, and the lady Anacaona, to show her the honor due her, they hanged her” (15).

Anacaona remains a model of resistance, of independence, and of faithfulness to her own people (Danticat 2005; Roumain 2013). She is different from other (infamous) feminine figures who have sexually welcomed the invaders in detriment to the survival of their own people. Anacaona is not the Native American Pocahontas, who embraced John Smith (Green 1975); Anacaona is not La Malinche either, who became the mistress of Hernan Cortés (Paz 1985, esp. ch. 4). Anacaona is not Rahab, who has been used/abused and manipulated to create fixed identities (Charles 2011). Anacaona is not the Samaritan woman at the well, who embraces the savior of the world and opens up her whole village to Jesus’s grand discourse, seemingly oblivious to the flesh-and-blood social and political realities of the people with whom he comes into contact. I am happy I have Anacaona’s blood and spirit in me. She is my mother. The rebellious spirit of Anacaona served my black ancestors well in the eighteenth century. The

rebellion of enslaved Africans that led to the only successful revolution by enslaved people in the history of humanity inspires me to resist and to be a rebel in my small ways. I choose to resist; I choose to emancipate myself from any form of slavery; I choose to be on the side of Anacaona. Anacaona guides me.

### Imagining Anacaona at the Well

She is a native woman; we know her name; she is a queen. We know the visitor; he is John's Jesus, the traveler from above. His goal is to present himself as the savior of the world so that she may believe in him. We know that through her he may have access to her whole people. The questions he asks are in order to enter into the conversation and to make her realize she needs what he has to offer. He knows who she is. At the death of her brother—King Behechio—she became the queen. She does not have a husband; she is well liked and respected by the inhabitants of her province. She receives the visitor from away with kindness, and the conversation is of good tone. He makes her understand that salvation is from the Jews and that the time has come when the true worshipers will worship God in spirit and in truth. He tells her he has a special gift for her; it is a special water. She is curious and she would like to have this water for herself and for her people as well. "Go and get your husband," he says to her. She does not have any. She is perplexed and she calls on her lords to come to know more about this stranger coming from afar. She does not believe he is the savior of the world. She does not quite understand what he means by that. She does not renounce her identity as a *cacica* of Xaraguá.

Her lords come, and Jesus talks to them for about two days. They find that he speaks about strange things; they find him to be a bit similar to the other strangers who came to their land recently. He does not wear a sword; he seems to be a shaman, but his speech is not quite understandable. They do not embrace his teachings; they do not believe in him. They do not shift from the ways of their ancestors to that of a foreigner. They could, at best, incorporate some of his discourses to that of the ancient wisdom teachings of their ancestors, but they see no reason to abandon everything about their way of life to embrace this new viewpoint. Jesus goes away. There is a rumor he has been crucified on a cross for political reasons in the land he was born. The cross has become an important symbol for those who are his followers. When the governor of the island needed to give the signal of when to ambush the natives who came to his reception, he placed his

hand on the cross that was on his chest. The descendants of Anacaona may well wonder whether that strange visitor at the well was not the chief conqueror, or whether he had any connections with the invaders. His place among these is not at all clear.

Those who have suffered all kinds of atrocities because of the imposition of the cross in this New World may be right—or better, are right—in questioning the message of salvation and the *mission civilisatrice* of the European Christians. John's Jesus does not seem to leave space to appreciate and negotiate cultural customs and cultural differences. John's Jesus does not leave any room to accommodate different truths. R. S. Sugirtharajah (2003, 124) suggests, "The colonialist mode of interpretation offered a simple choice between truth and falsehood. If one is right, the other is invariably wrong. What postcolonialism does is to force one to choose between truth and truth. The validation of one does not depend on the negation of the other." Imagining Anacaona in a postcolonial posture then means problematizing the sharp divide between truth and falsehood. This way of reading texts is, understandably, problematic to any normative Christian theological stance where the issue of absolute truth is deemed necessary. There must be, to many Christian interpreters, "true truths" for life to go on. It is a fact, they argue, some texts do say something in their historical contexts based on syntactical rules and that we readers cannot make anything we want from any text; this is one of the assumptions from which historical-critical methodology proceeds. The text of Scripture is assumed to have its inherent logic based on historical contexts, and thus, with the use of grammatical analysis—and with the help of the Holy Spirit, as some Christian interpreters would hold—we can understand the true and real meaning of the biblical texts.

However, imagining Anacaona at the well, as I read, pushes me beyond such narrow understanding of readings. Imagining Anacaona and people like her at the well opens up the possibility of envisaging serious, perhaps difficult dialogues, between equals. In this type of conversation, John's Jesus is also challenged. John's Jesus owes the Samaritans, who lives in close proximity to Judea and shares most of the key tenets of Judaism with the Jews, an explanation as to why the Jews are so hostile to them. In this sense, then, in what way is salvation from them? John's Jesus would need to understand that his message of salvation can also be one of terror and that this global world today—where power, poverty, misery, and wars threaten our mere survival—needs probably more than one superman. John's Jesus doubtless needs to understand that it is no longer time to hide

behind clear and neat theological responses and pretend that one ethnic and religious group has it all, that his followers are the only ones saved, that all the world needs is Jesus.

#### Problematizing the We and They in John 4

The Samaritan woman is sandwiched between Jesus, his disciples, and the town folks. Once Jesus declares to her, “I am the one speaking to you” (4:26), the reader is introduced to a different layer in the story. Jesus’s students return from their errands, and they are surprised to find him talking with a woman. The reader does not understand why these male students would be surprised by Jesus talking to a woman. In a previous chapter, John introduced Jesus speaking with a woman at the wedding when he turned water into wine (2:1–11)—there is no astonishment on the part of Jesus’s followers, probably because that was his mother and talking to her in private made a difference. The disciples, although surprised, do not say a word to Jesus concerning the unknown Samaritan woman. Instead, they press him to eat. This he refuses.

The narrative is taking the reader into strange and uncharted territory. Jesus once again goes into philosophical discourses, which his followers do not grasp: “I have food to eat that you know nothing about” (4:32). “Could someone have brought him food?” (4:33), his perplexed students wonder. One may well wonder, in company with the disciples, what he means by all this. What does John’s Jesus mean by the declaration, “I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor” (4:38). Surely, that has some kind of theological deep meaning. Yet, it sure sounds like the colonizers reaping what they have not sowed. If one pauses and thinks of the history of colonization, of the devastation of countries, of the depletion of lands, of the destruction of natural resources in light of these words, then one is allowed to have certain suspicion about the metanarrative lying behind this story.

The encounter of Jesus and the nameless female other may then be read as an authorizing tale to go and to reap the benefits of the labor of others. The Samaritan woman, thus, alongside her people, is a field to harvest. Musa Dube (2006, 307) remarks:

Notably, the saying evokes Josh. 24.13, where the Lord God speaks to the Israelites through Joshua saying, “I gave you a land on which you had not

labored, and towns that you had not built, and you live in them; you eat the fruit of vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.” The book of Joshua is a highly dramatized and idealized capture of the Canaan. It is a narrative that glorifies conquest and openly advocates violent colonialism in the name of God.

The imperialist dimension of the text becomes clearer once we place it within the discourse of Roman imperialism. The Johannine Jesus, read this way, becomes entangled within the Roman depiction of others imagined as defeated (females) under the powerful force of their collectively (male) Roman conqueror, with the Roman emperor hailed as the “Savior of the World” (Cameron 1991; López 2008; Peppard 2011).

### Leaving Traces

The Samaritan woman leaves the traveler Jesus to go to her people to inform them that he has told her everything she ever did and to ask whether he might truly be the Messiah. She is unsure of who he is. The reader might be uncertain as well about John’s Jesus’s true identity. The Samaritan, as she goes, leaves her trace behind. She leaves her water jar behind her (John 4:28). The bucket seems like a resisting element that refuses to be utterly eliminated by the narrator. The water jar signifies the Samaritan’s woman daily and mundane activity to satisfy her basic needs. The identity of the strange visitor from afar may be elusive, but the material remains testify she was there. Her bucket has not been erased. A nameless Samaritan woman was there. In Haiti, I remember visiting a museum with artifacts testifying to the existence of the first indigenous groups—dubbed erroneously the Indians by the colonizers—who had been annihilated by the Europeans. They, too, have left their traces. As I move on as a reader from away, I wish to leave my traces, alongside others who have been marginalized, ostracized, exploited, brutalized, and killed—all in the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

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## Navigating Networks: An Asian American Reading of the Samaritan Woman

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The long history of interpretation of John 4 reveals sustained focus on the Samaritan woman as a figure of curiosity whose apparent character, biography, identity, and social location are often seen as determinative of the story. Collectively, John's interpreters have attributed to her a role notable for its duality, one that casts her in the all-important role of linking Jesus's ministry to the Samaritan community but also plays on readers' frequently negative assessments of her. She is, alternatively, the object of readers' fascination, condescension, pity, and admiration.

Readerly fixation on the Samaritan woman resonates with the experience of minoritized persons subjected to the gaze of others. For Asian Americans, who are regularly cast in terms of alternating and racializing stereotypes such as the model minority and the perpetual foreigner, the Samaritan woman's place in the interpretation of John 4 carries a familiar sting. Moreover, for a specific group in Asian America, namely, adoptees born in East or Southeast Asia and then adopted and raised in the United States, most often by white families, the phenomenon of being an object of casual yet intense and intrusive curiosity, pity, and conjecture is easy to recognize.

To read John 4:1–42 as an Asian American adoptee is to engage a figure whose past is barely in view and whose present is determined, in part, by the gestures of those in her midst and the objects that constitute her world and her identity. Asian American adoptees may recognize something of ourselves in John's portrayal of the Samaritan woman, a figure who remains only partially in view and whose name remains unknown to us readers.

## Reading as an Asian American Adoptee

As is well known, the United States has participated in waves of Asian adoption, with the total number of such intercountry adoptions exceeding more than 110,000. The greatest numbers of Asian American adoptees hail from China or South Korea, where adoptions began in the early 1950s. With Chinese adoptions gaining ground in the mid-1990s, intercountry adoption in the United States increased steadily, doubling between 1995 and 2004, and then declining since 2005. As Gretchen Miller Wrobel observes, the dynamics inherent in intercountry adoption generate a host of questions and anxieties about racial and ethnic identity, personal histories, and what constitutes family. She notes, "Reactions to a person's adopted status can be positive (e.g., 'That's cool that you are adopted!') or negative (e.g., 'Why were you given away?')" (Wrobel 2012, 320). It is not unusual for adoptees to field questions or statements such as, "Who's your real mother?" "Okay, then what are you?" and "You really should look for your real family." In each case, such questions position the adoptee as an object of public inquiry, subject to the curious gaze of strangers. Moreover, if answers are not readily available, questions such as these suggest that the adoptee is somehow incomplete or inadequate.

Adoptees often internalize such questions and assumptions, adding yet another layer to the questions about personal identity and hidden histories that we often carry throughout our entire lives. One's personal narrative intersects in shifting ways with one's construction of race and ethnicity, depending on what and how much is known, discovered, or mythologized about their family of origin and the circumstances surrounding the adoption. Wrobel (2012, 320) notes that for racial/ethnic minoritized children adopted by white parents, it is not uncommon for adoptees to view themselves initially as part of the majority culture and to find themselves "perceived and treated by others ... as if they were members of the majority culture." As child adoptees mature, and as they interact with others away from their families, they are increasingly subjected, as minoritized persons, to ethnic stereotyping and racism. Adoptees intuitively learn early that racial/ethnic identity is socially powerful and frequently wielded in cruel and alienating ways as a mechanism for signaling that one is never quite authentic enough to belong fully to any racial/ethnic community. The phenomenon adds to the complexity of the adoptive experience and deepens the stigma and marginalization that adoptees can experience (Darnell et al. 2017).



Sociological research on adoption has given disproportionate attention to the experiences and perspectives of adoptive parents, who tend to see adoption more as a private family experience than as a phenomenon “that unfolds within a complex interplay of private and societal understandings of what constitutes families” (Willing, Fronek, and Cuthbert 2012, 466–67). Research shows that white parents seeking to acknowledge and hold in high regard the complexity of their adopted children’s histories and identities tend to place more value on culture-keeping practices than do their adopted children. Interestingly, many more parents of children adopted in Asia engage in practices such as cultural heritage camps than do parents of adopted children born in Eastern Europe.

Asian American adoptees are sometimes, if inadvertently, raised by adoptive parents to think of themselves in terms of an identity that is rooted in a construction of Asian culture that is meant to create for the child adoptee a sense of heritage. When such formation depends on the identification of a place one has never known as one’s homeland, the risk of perpetuating and imposing on Asian American adoptees the stereotype of the perpetual foreigner looms large. This perpetual-foreigner image is unwittingly reinforced by parents who, focused on the interpersonal dimensions of adoption, fail to recognize their adopted children’s experience as also an *Asian American* one. In this way and others, adoptive parents’ perceptions of racial/ethnic hybridity often stand in stark contrast to the racism their minoritized children experience and apart from any deep understanding of the racialization and racism Asian Americans experience. In this complex landscape, Jiannbin Lee Shiao and Mia Tuan (2007; cf. Tuan and Shiao 2011) observe how the adoptee’s ethnic and racial identity unfolds over time and in relation not just to family and kinship but to broad social contexts, interactions, and environments.

### Networks and the Social

Alternating and alienating encounters with ethnic stereotyping, racial invisibility, and racism often intensify for Asian American adoptees the felt absence of those in the adoptive kinship network who, due to inter-country adoption practices, typically remain unknown to them. The kinship network, which situates the adoptee at the center of a constellation of persons related, through birth and adoption, to the child, is significant whether or not such persons are known to one another. For “even when there is no contact between birth and adoptive families, they

are psychologically present to each other with the knowledge that for a child to be adopted into one family that child must have been born into another” (Wrobel 2012, 316). In other words, the adoptive kinship network consists of persons who are actively engaged in a relationship with the adoptee as well those who are not.

Research focusing on adult Korean American adoptees shows how integral a place biological parents, known only through stories learned in the adoption process, retain in the adoptive kinship network (Darnell et al. 2017). Organizations dedicated to supporting Asian American adoptees, and media stories about adult adoptees seeking their birth mothers and/or families of origin, aim to validate and address the ongoing significance of absent members of the kinship network. Organizations such as Asian Nation and Pact: An Adoption Alliance recognize the complexity of, as well as the debates surrounding, transracial and intercountry adoption. Asian Nation provides resources for Asian American adoptees (e.g., Le 2020), while Pact serves “adopted children of color.”

For Asian adoptees growing up in the United States, where the adoption process often prevents the adoptee from knowing anything at all about their family of origin, encounters with racism augment the adoptee’s awareness of the birth family’s profound absence. As awareness of the importance of the adoptive kinship network has grown, families and adoption professionals have increasingly drawn on an ethic of hospitality to articulate the importance of welcoming not only children through adoption but also their birth parents. This ethic has led to an increase in domestic open adoption in the United States, an experience that is largely denied Asian American adoptees.

The kinship network to which adoption literature refers lends itself to further theoretical exploration, as seen in the sociological studies of Patricia Fronek, who draws on the work of Bruno Latour to examine intercountry adoption. Actor network theory, concerned with how things, or actors, circulate and interact with various human and nonhuman actors, such as objects and environments, argues that it is networks, not fixed contexts or social forces, that make up what we call “the social” (Latour 2005). For Latour, networks constitute the world in which we live. Every process, practice, and organization can be described as a network of actors that functions to produce particular effects. Networks are both the condition and the product of their interaction. Thus, in their studies of intercountry adoption, Fronek and Cheryl Tilse (2010) argue for the complexity of multiple actor networks that include both the adoptive kinship network and

additional networks of proponents, opponents, and nonpartisans engaged in the practice of intercountry adoption.

Seen in this light, the experience of intercountry adoptees, most often refracted through the lens of deeply personal human relations, is nonetheless implicated in vast networks of human and nonhuman actors. Identity and a sense of social belonging depend not on static notions of homeland, heritage, family, or nationality, but on networks that are dynamic and associations that are always in motion. The adoptee, as an actor, is a product or assemblage of the network. As networks shift, so does the actor. Thus, network theory may prove useful for plumbing the complexity and fluidity of Asian American adoptee identity formation, making space for the ways in which adoptees construct ethnicity and identity as they move within multiple networks.

That networks involve far more than simply the formation of the interpersonal and familial is made evident in the case of intercountry adoptees without citizenship in their home country. National identity, as well as the lack thereof, is implicated in the networks that constitute adoption. In the crisis of Asian American adoptees in the United States who have been denied citizenship, the adoptee is indeed rendered a perpetual foreigner. The Adoption Rights Campaign in America, an organization that is led by adoptees and which joined the World Hug Foundation in 2018, thus advocates for the right to American citizenship that approximately thirty-five thousand adult intercountry adoptees in the United States have yet to obtain. Currently, dozens of adult adoptees who lived in the United States for decades have been deported and are living, sometimes without documentation, in birth countries they do not know and far apart from their families. Citizenship and true hospitality have been denied these adoptees. They are regarded as aliens in the land they know as home and often feel foreign in the birth countries to which they have been returned. The case of adoptees denied by the only country they really know exposes the degree to which multiple kinds of identity formation are subject to changing, contingent, and historically constructed networks shaped by shifting power relations. It also casts light on the significance of hospitality as it is practiced or denied, not only but families but also by nations.

#### Rereading John 4

As an object that is always on the move, the Bible, too, has functioned in countless networks. Rather than speaking of contextualized readings,

where interpreters work in and from fixed contexts or locations of intersectionality, it may be more useful to conceptualize interpretation as that which occurs within networks of readers and other actors. Drawing on Latour's notion of tracing, we can think more specifically about naming the objects that, along with the Bible, circulate in our networks and produce our readings of it. In terms of reading specific texts, network theory may prove useful in showing how literature, including biblical narrative, "figures sociality in an accurate way whenever it renders a dynamic field of interaction among human and non-human actants. Literature, in this sense, constitutes a way of knowing about collective life, and thus provides some traction on the elusiveness of the social" (Alworth 2016, 311). Moreover, as Rita Felski (2015, 739–40) notes, Latour sees texts in the midst of circulation as "possess(ing) their own ontological dignity," which necessitates "taking care not to conjure textual meanings out of pre-existing assumptions or explanation" but "honoring and detailing the singular features of a text as well as the specific routes along which it travels." Reading is an act of co-composing, where agency is distributed rather than simply assigned.

To read John 4:1–42 alongside Asian American adoptees is to begin with a heightened sensitivity to how interpreters read the Samaritan woman and how the gospel narrative assembles the social and situates her. Interpreters have long read the woman in John 4 in terms of stigma, borne of the gender and ethnically inflected assumptions they impose on the text. As Danna Nolan Fewell and Gary Phillips (1997, 23) recount, readers often bring a presumed familiarity with the woman and her circumstances to their interpretation of John 4:

The Samaritan Woman. You know her. Everybody knows her. The woman Jesus met at the well. Simple. Obtuse. Literal-minded. Promiscuous. Trapped in physicality. A social outcast. The one who didn't quite get it right, but who led others to Jesus in spite of herself. The one John has used to exhibit his mastery of ironic discourse. The one readers have used to make their moral points. The used, dispatched woman.

In the history of interpretation, the Samaritan woman is the epitome of the proverbial saying "familiarity breeds contempt." Seen in such unsparing light, the woman falls victim to readers who attribute to her a questionable character, one that is rooted in their own assumptions about her ethnicity and gender. Such assumptions about the woman are deployed

to underscore, by contrast, both the abundance of Jesus's beneficence and readers' perceptions of their own spiritual superiority. Read in this way, the woman's later witness to the Samaritans in John 4 marks her as one who finally approaches the reader's consciousness. At every point along the story, then, she is the object of readers' judgments about her.

Against a majority of previous readings, postcolonial interpreters have brought intentionally nuanced perspective to analysis of John 4 to read the Samaritan woman's portrayal differently. Aiming "to restore the position of the Samaritan woman as a creative agent" in the gospel narrative, Sung Uk Lim (2010, 41) observes how the woman actively interrogates Jesus. Lim casts the interaction as an example of anticolonial mimicry that nativizes Jesus and creates within him an ambivalent identity that he demonstrates in John 8:48–49. Responding to the dual charge that he is a Samaritan and has a demon, Jesus denies the latter but keeps silent about the former. In her reading of John 4, Terese Okure, too, focuses on the interaction that occurs between Jesus and the woman. In contrast to Lim, Okure begins by underscoring what the two characters share in common. Jesus's experience is consistently "colored by prejudice and rejection" borne largely of the anti-Galilean sentiment that permeates the narrative (Okure 2009, 406). Characterizing the Samaritan woman as someone "living on the fringe of society," Okure concludes that Jesus and the Samaritan woman "share the experience of rejection, prejudice, and isolation" (409). Like Lim, she notes how the woman exercises agency to "transcend the barriers of prejudice and the stigmas of racism and sexism" to engage Jesus (409).

Yet the woman's past and the details of her circumstances remain largely unknown. No matter how sympathetic a reading may be, a closer look at the Samaritan woman sidesteps many of the questions and assumptions, whether favorable or unfavorable, that readers bring to the text. Though interpreters have claimed that she comes to the well at midday because she is ostracized by other women, who visit the well early in the morning, readers do not really know why the woman comes to the well alone or why she married five times.

For example, the scene portrays the woman, as well as Jesus's disciples, explicitly referring to ethnic and gender difference as reasons to be surprised by Jesus's interaction with her (4:9, 27). Yet ethnic, geographic, and religious identity in John's Gospel is decidedly unclear and fraught, particularly in relation to οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, as Adele Reinhartz (2009, 384) and others have noted. The meaning of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι shifts and blurs in its deployment in the Fourth Gospel, because it circulates narratively in multiple, complex

networks-in-motion. Interestingly, although John appears to assume the Jewish identity of Jesus and his disciples throughout the narrative, only in John 4:9 does the narrative—through the Samaritan woman’s speech—explicitly refer to Jesus as Jewish. Given the complexity of John’s references to οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, the appearance of *Jew* and *Samaritan* in the scene is notable. What they connote, though, cannot be merely assumed.

Recognition of how identity is formed and produced in and through networks opens the door to checking the framework for Jewish-Samaritan relations that interpreters bring to their reading of John. Contra the categorical hatred between Jews and Samaritans that readers frequently assume, Robert Gordon Maccini and Gary Knoppers find more evidence for a general ambivalence that could sometimes reach a level of antagonism between the two groups. Knoppers suggests that there was no single position held by Jews or Samaritans about the other that was representative of either group. Indeed, “the widely held view of an absolute breach between members of the two communities during Roman and Byzantine times goes beyond the available evidence by presuming what it needs to prove, namely, that the two groups were self-contained and unitary entities, which each went their separate ways” (Knoppers 2013, 219). Moreover, “how much Jews and Samaritans distinguished between holding strictly to their theological tenets and dealing practically with the realities of ordinary life also varied. A Samaritan could express hostility toward the Jerusalem temple and yet have practical dealings with contemporary Jews” (217). Among other things, Jews sometimes dined with Samaritans, considered them valid witnesses in certain legal proceedings, and permitted them entry into the inner court of the Jerusalem temple (Maccini 1994, 44–45).

These observations resonate with John’s rendering of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, who are drawn in close proximity to each other and in a manner that suggests tension and ambivalence, rather than a complete breach between the communities they represent. Notably, Jesus does not hesitate to travel through Samaria or to enter into Sychar, or even to stay with the Samaritans for two days (John 4:43). Clearly, drawing on the meaning of the characters’ social and cultural identities as if they can be imported into the narrative from a fixed context is a fraught proposition.

As the scene unfolds, the narrator names many components of the woman’s network, including references to places (Sychar, Samaria, Jacob’s well, mountain, Jerusalem), human and nonhuman actors (Jacob, Joseph, Jacob’s sons, Jesus; husbands, nonhusband, ancestors, Father,

God, Messiah; disciples, the people, Samaritans, Savior), ethnicity and gender (Jew[s], Samaritan, woman, man), and actors that are nonhuman objects (well, drink, gift, living water, bucket, flocks, spring of water, eternal life, truth, mountain, salvation, spirit, worship, water jar, city, world). The narrative fills out the network that constitutes the woman whom the scene first introduces only as a “Samaritan woman” (4:7), situating her in “a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son, Joseph,” and adding that “Jacob’s well was there” (4:5–6a). The scene zeroes in on the woman’s ethnicity, location, and gender, and positions her in contrast to Jesus. Thus, it is unsurprising when she responds to Jesus’s request for a drink with language that emphasizes difference based on these same factors: “How is that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (4:9). Her concern suggests common usage of the utensils she must use to draw water and offer Jesus a drink, implicating the significance of objects for constructing the identity of the two figures.

The scene progresses with additional references to objects (or, for Latour, actors) that constitute the woman’s network. After first telling her, “Go, call your husband, and come back” (4:16) and hearing her reply, “I have no husband” (4:17–18), Jesus reveals to the woman that he knows her history of having had five husbands. He declares, “the one you have now is not your husband,” and confirms that what she has spoken is true (4:18; ἀληθές). Truth and recognition of the woman’s past, though left undetailed, factor in the network emerging between the two figures. Jesus’s response causes the woman to recognize that he is a prophet, prompting her to ask about the religious practices and spaces that distinguish Jews and Samaritans.

In the turning point of the exchange, Jesus declares, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem,” for “the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true [ἀληθινοί] worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth [ἀληθείᾳ]” (4:21, 23–24). Truth continues to emerge as a prominent component in the network that the woman and Jesus are forging. While Jesus does not dissolve ethnic and religious difference (“You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews,” v. 22), he shifts the network to forge new attachments and compose a new group of “true worshipers” from among those formerly identified as “you” (plural) and “we.”



Just as the initial conversation about needing a drink led to the narrative's new attachment to living water, so does the language about worship space shift to the nature of worship itself and those who participate in it.

As a result, the woman leaves her water jar and heads into the city to speak to "the people" (4:28), focusing on what Jesus has revealed, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!" (4:29, 39). The woman is the one who enables Jesus's expanding network and whose testimony leads to the inclusion of the Samaritans and their recognition of Jesus as "Savior of the world" (4:39–40). Appearing in the Fourth Gospel only this one time, the title picks up on the theme that John introduces in 3:17 ("Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him") and repeats in 12:47b ("for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world"). Echoing language used for Caesar, the phrase signals the Samaritans' recognition that Jesus is for all people. Thus the scene that opens with an emphasis on that which differentiates Jesus from the Samaritan woman ends with the Samaritans' declaration that Jesus is the savior of the world, a conviction made possible through the woman's testimony.

### Genre as Mediator

The genre of John 4 provides an additional framework for exploring the encounter between Jesus and the woman. In terms of Latour's notion of intermediaries and mediators, with the former referring to the circulation of meaning without transformation and the latter to that which modifies, translates, or transforms meaning, genre functions as a mediator. Against Robert Alter's (1981) influential identification of John 4 as a biblical betrothal type-scene, scholars have argued that the genre is unsuitable; the scene does not, in fact, lead to a betrothal (Fewell and Phillips 1997; Arterbury 2010). Andrew Arterbury (2010, 66) argues that the chapter is read better as a depiction of hospitality, the "Mediterranean social convention that was employed when a person chose to assist a traveler who was away from his or her home region by supplying him or her with provisions and protection." He adds:

In a hospitality relationship, the burning question relates to the guest's identity. Consequently, in ancient narratives, the climactic moments are often built around the moment a guest reveals their identity to the host (e.g. *Od* 8.548–86; 9.1–11.332; 11.385–12.453). Likewise, in John 4, both



the social context and the verbal dialogue point in the same direction ... the Samaritan woman concludes that Jesus is a prophet (v. 19) and she wonders whether Jesus is the “Messiah” (vv. 25, 29). Furthermore, in the course of the hospitality relationship, the Samaritan people arrive at the conclusion that Jesus is “the Savior of the World (v. 42).” (81)

With hospitality framing John 4, if not the entire gospel, as suggested by Wayne Meeks (1972), we can take a second look at the interaction that occurs between Jesus and the woman. With Lim and Okure, we note the engaged quality of the Samaritan woman’s exchange with Jesus. Taking a cue from Fewell and Phillips, we can observe how the *woman* avoids stereotyping *Jesus* and demonstrates an ethic of engagement by questioning him as she does. The scene bears verisimilitude to Maccini’s understanding of Jewish-Samaritan relations in antiquity. His corrective enables us to see better the relational opening that the Samaritan woman creates when she meets his request for a drink with a question of her own: “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (4:9). Rather than simply asserting what it must mean or that it simply cannot be the case, she inquires as to how Jesus is able to go against the grain of relations between Jews and Samaritans, which, if not openly hostile, are at least ambivalent. She regards Jesus in a way that recognizes both their difference and the limited knowledge of the other that notions of difference afford. In contrast, we can consider the disciples’ response when they return to find Jesus at the well. John writes, “They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, ‘What do you want?’ or, ‘Why are you speaking with her?’” (4:27). The disciples, in their stunned silence, make no attempt at all to interrupt the flow of their assumptions and stereotypes. Their assumptions are enough for them. But not for the Samaritan woman.

Jesus’s reply to the question the woman poses in John 4:9 adds a new twist to the scene. He does not answer her directly. Instead, he reverses the context of hospitality. “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is speaking to you..., you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water” (v. 10). Jesus posits that it is she who is in need and it is he who can provide. Still undeterred, she inquires further as to who he is, “Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well...?” (v. 12). Again eluding a direct answer to her question, Jesus returns to the topic of the water that he can give, which becomes for those who drink it “a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (v. 14). Only after she declares she wants this remarkable water does Jesus say, “Go, call your husband, and

come back" (v. 16), and enter into their exchange about her having had five husbands. With the relationship of hospitality functioning in reciprocal fashion, the woman's identity, too, is brought into focus. Despite the lack of clear textual indication regarding the circumstances of her marriages, what this narrative detail reveals is a life of suffering. Five marriages, whether due to divorce or widowhood or a combination of both, would have been a hard path to travel. And what Jesus confirms is neither her guilt, nor her need of forgiveness, but her truthfulness. He simply says, "What you have said is true" (v. 18). Jesus performs a hospitable and gracious act, not the game of gotcha that it is often taken to be. She confirms Jesus's word as well as his identity: "Sir, I see you are a prophet" (v. 19).

The moment of Jesus's self-revelation follows their next exchange and illustrates the woman's willingness to engage and be engaged by Jesus beyond stereotypes and assumptions. When she raises the age-old question about the different sacred sites that Jews and Samaritans recognize, Jesus's answer begins with language that emphasizes religious difference, but he then shifts to talk more inclusively about how (all) "true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (v. 23). At this moment of inclusion, the woman says, "I know Messiah is coming" (v. 25), to which Jesus responds, "I am [he], the one speaking to you" (v. 26).

Thus, over the course of this hospitality type-scene, which initially casts Jesus as the traveler in need and the woman as host, and then does the inverse, both the woman and Jesus engage the other in terms that recognize their difference, while reaching beyond stereotype. Each is rendered a potential host and provider to the other. Indeed, Jesus ends up staying there for two days, as a guest of the Samaritans who believe and "know that this is truly the Savior [σωτήρ] of the world [κόσμου]" (4:42). Both Jesus, who will later be identified by "the Jews" as a Samaritan, rather than as a Jew by a Samaritan, and the woman, who proclaims "He told me everything I have ever done" (4:39b), are changed by their encounter with the other in a dynamic network of human and nonhuman components that provides readers a window onto what the gospel conceives of as "the world" (κόσμος).

The interaction of the human and nonhuman for the sake of the world is, of course, a central premise of John's Gospel. From the start, the gospel posits the creative role of the divine Word or λόγος in bringing into being all things, that is, everything apart from the divine itself. The prologue declares, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son full of grace and truth"

(1:14). As D. Moody Smith (1999, 58) thus observes, “The entire prologue is full of terms and concepts that will be unpacked in the course of the Gospel, but in this sentence about every other word is crucial: Word, flesh, lived, we, glory, son, father, grace, truth.” The Word bridges the divide between the earthly and heavenly, the human and divine, the created and the generative. In this way, John builds for his readers an ontology that allows for the indeterminate interaction of the human and nonhuman.

That indetermination is a facet of the Word itself is suggested by the gospel’s placement of the so-called I am (ἐγώ εἰμι) sayings on the lips of Jesus. When they occur with a predicate nominative (as in “I am the bread of life,” 6:35; and “I am the light of the world,” 8:12), they identify Jesus as that which satisfies general human need and longing. In other instances, they are reminiscent of the biblical name of God (Exod 3:14; Isa 41:4), signaling divine being as open-ended, dynamic, and defying precise definition (Smith 1999). Both senses of the “I am” statements play out in the gospel, which portrays human believers, like the Samaritan woman and the residents of Sychar, as both drawn to and transformed by the incarnate Word. In John 4, where the incarnate λόγος encounters the Samaritan woman, John continues to build his case that believers are to partake of and be transformed by the living water and bread of life that Jesus embodies and offers (6:35).

This network of actors, both human and nonhuman, shifts and moves throughout the gospel, including chapter 4, and helps constitute the figures of Jesus and those whom he encounters. A close reading of John 4 reveals the ways in which both the woman and Jesus retain their preexisting networks while becoming constituted by a new one, which includes them, living water, and all of the κόσμος. The new network facilitates reciprocity and hospitality that the participants provide for one another, without erasing the significance of the objects (Jacob’s well, drinking water) with which they identified and which also initially divided them. Rather, these dynamic networks, new and old, coexist. The Samaritans relate, individually and collectively, to the “savior of the world.” Without relinquishing who they have been, both the Samaritan woman and Jesus are changed by who each other is.

### A Concluding Comment

The story of the Samaritan woman in John 4:1–42 resonates with the experience of Asian American adoptees moving through networks visible and

hidden, and engaged in an ongoing interrogation and exploration of race, ethnicity, and other forms of identity. As John 4 displays, it is networks that assemble the social. So, too, it is circulation in and through networks new and old—composed of the present and the past, as well as actors known and unknown—that constitutes the process of identity formation for the adoptee. Neither Asian American adoptees nor the woman of Sychar represent static communities. Their communities belong to and call them into a personhood that is both embedded in networks and positioned to navigate, change, and expand them.

All can be hosts and guests in the vision of hospitality that emerges in John 4. Perhaps the same can be realized in networks of Asian American adoption. Reading in the midst of the multiple and contingent networks that constitute intercountry adoption, reciprocal hospitality surfaces as an ideal that John 4 challenges us to more fully embody. Yet the experience of Asian American adoptees and the networks that shape racial formation, gender, economic inequality, public policy and family law, cultural constructions of family, intercountry relations, and other conditions of adoption can only be examined and understood in situ. The work that needs to be done to better understand Asian American adoption must move from stereotypes and binary generalizations to honest engagement with the complexity and particularity of the networks that shape Asian American adoption. The same can be said of how we read biblical texts, including John 4 and the story of the Samaritan woman.

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“It Is No Longer Because of Your Words...”:  
Interrogating John 4 through the Lens of  
*Malinchismo* and the Vanquished Woman Motif

David Arthur Sánchez

Theorizing Minoritized Biblical Criticism

The occasion for this writing project under the rubric of biblical cultural studies is an opportunity not only to critically parse the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John—the awkward interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman from our various subjectivities—but also to vigorously foreground our collective marronage as minoritized scholars within the academy in which we exist (i.e., our positionality as intellectual maroons in the guild). Thus, I begin my essay with an assessment of how I have come to understand biblical cultural studies as a vital hermeneutic strategy and *art of resistance* in our guild in conjunction with an explicit acknowledgment of the motivations and stakes in the implementation of such a stance, which functions as a disruption to historic productions of dominant knowledge systems that I/we seek to challenge—if not altogether (dis)place—with competing minoritized knowledge systems in the “ongoing process[es] of liberation and decolonization in the discipline” (Segovia 1995, 29).

According to Fernando F. Segovia (1995, 28–29), biblical cultural studies

[foregrounds] the flesh and blood reader: always positioned and interested; socially and historically conditioned and unable to transcend such conditions—to attain a sort of asocial and ahistorical nirvana.... [It is] a joint critical study of texts and readers, perspectives and ideologies. We can differentiate Biblical Cultural Studies from Cultural Criticism—and, for that matter, “traditional” modalities of biblical criticism—in that the

latter two cases posit “a [universal,] neutral and disinterested reader presupposed by historical criticism.”

He continues,

the enduring construct of a universal and informed reader, the reader who would attain to impartiality and objectivity through the adoption of scientific methods and the denial of particularity and contextuality, was a praiseworthy goal but also quite naïve and dangerous. It was praiseworthy because it did realize, however faintly, the effects of social location on all reading and interpretation. It was naïve because it thought that it could really avoid or neutralize such effects by means of an acquired and hard-earned scientific persona. It was dangerous because in the end what were in effect highly personal and social constructions regarding texts and history were advanced as scholarly retrievals and reconstructions, scientifically secured and hence not only methodologically unassailable but also ideologically neutral. [This] construct remained inherently colonialist and imperialistic [which required] all readers to interpret like Eurocentric critics. (29)

This it did especially with regard to literatures deemed by the dominant as classics and authoritative.

According to Vincent Wimbush (2000, 10), the hypothetical practice of objective approaches to those “classic literatures” is in reality “a class-specific cultural practice that is a fetishization of text that in turn reflects a dominating world that the text helped create.” Therefore, the collection of these essays under the rubric of biblical cultural criticism

presents to academic biblical studies [a] most defiant challenge: it argues that the point of departure for and even the crux of interpretation not be texts but worlds.... Further, it argues that this point of departure should begin in a different time—not with the (“biblical”) past but with the present, that is, with the effort to understand how the present is being shaped by the Bible. (19)

An assessment, therefore, of scholarship that we might collectively deem traditional (i.e., purporting to be neutral, scientific, and objectivized readings) on John 4 should demonstrate a text-centric and domesticated rendering of textual engagements and serve as examples “of [a] western cultural domestication and containment” of the Bible. Such renderings, again in the imaginings of Wimbush (2000, 10), “assume something about the



present—that the present is pacific and unified, uniform and consonant, ascendent and dominant, that is constituted or determined by a fairly clear and dominant cultural myth and hermeneutical spin that needs to be continuously ratified and affirmed by recourse to the past, to archivalization and memorialization.”

### History of Interpretation

Readers should, therefore, not be surprised to discover that the majority of biblical commentaries on the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John focus primarily on the religious *conversion* of the othered Samaritan woman by the normative Jesus rather than—as I argue—on the cultural domination and sexual chastisement of the former by the latter. Commentaries are also silent concerning the subsequent dissemination of the triumphant gospel message with its corresponding *destiny made manifest* to an ethnically overessentialized group of Samaritan townspeople. The unit’s main function within the gospel, in my estimation, is primarily ecclesial and mission dominant, with strong tinges of gender and ethnocultural hierarchizations. This foregrounding of ecclesial and missionizing triumphalism dominates and suppresses other potential interpretive avenues that might focus on the gender and the ethnocultural considerations that are rarely attended to in the commentaries. Even when these gendered and ethnocultural concerns are noted, attentions are quickly redirected to the ultimate transformation of the woman from impure to pure, sexualized to chastised, peripheral to centered, passive to active, and gentile to Christian.

For example, the late Raymond Brown (1966, 177) observed that in 4:9 the Samaritan “woman mocks Jesus for being so in need that he does not observe” the social customs of the time. These involve (1) the restrictions on male/female public interactions as dictated by honor/shame social conventions of the ancient Mediterranean world, and (2) the Judean and Galilean ethnocultural posture that constructs Samaritan identity as the mixture of at least two ethnic groups: “the remnant of native Israelites who were not deported at the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.[E.]” and “foreign colonists brought in from Babylonia and Media by the Assyrian conquerors of Samaria” (170). Thus, the narrative sets up the Samaritan woman as a *misinterpreter* of the *new* social, cultural, and gender conventions soon to be introduced by Jesus. She is used in the narrative as a thematic foil for the superior living water as taught by Jesus. However, this living water comes at some personal cost for the woman.

The conversion of the Samaritan woman and her fellow townspeople is a curious narrative in the sense that we are told that Jews and Samaritans “[hold] nothing in common,” based on the common Jewish assumption that “Samaritans were ritually impure” (Brown 1966, 170). Brown cites a Jewish regulation from 65–66 CE that “warned that one could never count on the ritual purity of Samaritan women since they were menstruants from the cradle” (170). Brown goes on to conclude that the interaction between Jesus—the Galilean Jew—and the Samaritan woman “shows that the *real reason* for his action is not his inferiority or need, but his superior [religious] status” (177).

What is problematic about this reading is that it conflates Jesus’s religious primacy with an implied ethnocultural and masculine superiority. The high christological position of the Gospel of John facilitates the former, while the narrative implies the latter. Thus, any interrogation of the unit from the perspective of ethnicity, culture, or gender is overwhelmed by the superiority of Jesus’s religious status as framed in the Gospel of John. The Word made flesh and his superior living water move freely through the text without interrogation of the new world order being created. The woman who initially mocks Jesus is transformed in two stages: (1) from mocker to the one who misunderstood and (2) from the one who misunderstood to the one who becomes the vessel of Jesus’s living water, while simultaneously lacking the full depth of knowledge of his new, spiritual fluid.

Likewise, Jerry Neyrey (2003), in his article “What’s Wrong with this Picture?,” argues from a social-scientific perspective that the dangerous cross-gendered encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is not as problematic or dangerous for this isolated female actor—and locus of familial honor—as the reader might first perceive, even in light of the disciples’ apparent distress at the encounter: “They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman” (see John 4:27b). Neyrey (see esp. 2003, 99–107) argues, citing multiple ancient authors (Philo, Plutarch, and Cicero included) and modern cultural anthropologists, that the ancient peoples of the eastern Mediterranean viewed all reality in terms of gender division, that is, in terms of honor and shame, relegating women to the domain of the private (*οἶκος*) and men to the domain of the public (*πόλις*). Nevertheless, Neyrey concludes by noting that the encounter between the Samaritan woman and Jesus is not demonstrative of Jesus (and the woman) violating cultural conventions on gender relations, but rather that the passage exhibits a translation of the male-female and public-private

dichotomies to a private-private relationship via the social-scientific concept of fictive kinship. He argues:

Thus [from the reader's perspective] less and less is perceived as "wrong with this picture." Not only is the individual transformation of the woman narrated, but the nature of the social relationships between her and Jesus is also changed. As the woman is welcomed into Jesus' "private" world, she sheds her "public" sauciness and speaks truthfully and receives intimate communications. She then begins to model behavior appropriate to the "private" world of Jesus' fictive kinship circle, and so she represents much that is "right with this picture." (Neyrey 2003, 125)

Once again, the interpretive exploitation of the Samaritan woman from the perspective of culture, ethnicity, and gender is denied by her supposed entry into the private sphere of Jesus's fictive (and masculine) kinship circle—again, the triumphant Word to the woman's rescue. Thus, the Samaritan woman is relegated to the *expendable* role of rhetorical substrate for the forthcoming mighty deeds of Jesus.

By positing the commentaries of Brown and Neyrey as examples of traditional interpretations of John 4, which in my estimation they are, then we are able to highlight that traditional interpretations of John 4 portray the woman as transformed by her encounter with the superior Jesus (for a sampling of other traditional interpretations see also Bultmann 1971; Schnackenburg 1968–1982; Barrett 1978). She is in need of transformation. Her initial confidence, demonstrated in the sharp encounter of the challenge/riposte scene, is ultimately reconfigured when she becomes the expendable vessel for the new living water given by Jesus.

However, this transformation comes at tremendous personal cost to the Samaritan woman, as she is chastised for her marital history by Jesus. Thus, she is reconfigured in the narrative as sexually deviant and in desperate need of transformation. Her new role as vessel of living water to the townspeople of Samaria is a transitory one. Now chastised, she serves simply as a temporary intermediary until the townspeople encounter the superior water vessel, Jesus. At this point in the narrative, the woman is discarded (which is validated in the narrative by Jesus's questioning of her marital/sexual history).

In sharp contrast to the two representative examples cited above, Louise Schottroff (1996, 157) argues that the tradition of interpretation of John 4 has been "thoroughly androcentric in all its versions (more androcentric, in fact, than the text itself) and, for the most part, massively

misogynistic as well.” She goes on to identify four reading strategies that have dominated the interpretive landscape as relates to John 4 that she labels as both “gynophobic” and “woman despising” (158):

1. Jesus as the woman’s prosecutor based on moral grounds. “This moral denigration,” she states, “is based on the patriarchal stereotype of the ‘bad woman.’” She indicts the influence of Rudolf Bultmann as the impetus for this “dominant” interpretation over the last century.
2. Discrimination against Samaritan religion. Here interpreters have read the multiple husbands as symbolic of Samaritan idolatry.
3. Reading the fate of the Samaritan woman as a “marginal issue in the text.” The major theme is Jesus’s omniscience.
4. Interpreting the Samaritan woman as the one who misunderstands the message of Jesus and a passive dialogue partner in deferment to Jesus. This reading strategy is all the more problematic in that “This interpretation of the woman’s words as ‘misunderstanding’ in the sense of Johannine dualism leads interpreters to fail to take her seriously as a dialogue partner and to regard her as *merely a vehicle* for introducing terms that offer clues to something higher.” (161, emphasis added)

Arguably, the two interpretive examples above, including the perduring influence of Bultmann, embody at least one, if not all, of the characteristics described by Schottroff. The benefit of Schottroff’s contribution to the discussion of John 4 is that it opens up the possibility of reading the rhetorical violence exacted on the Samaritan woman and subsequent androcentric interpretations of the text. Foregrounding her role in the narrative allows for a reconsideration of her role—one who is used, chastised, violated, and ultimately discarded by the narrative action for the sake of the triumphant gospel message and the superior living water of Jesus.

### A Chicano Interrogation of John 4

From the perspective of a Chicano optic,<sup>1</sup> it is not difficult to parse John 4 as a mandate for aggressive and sexualized missionizing in an

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1. I specifically use the masculine *Chicano* here to emphasize a patriarchal and male-centric misreading of the text in question.

othered, feminized, and ethnically exotic land. Jesus (and the disciples) *penetrate* Samaria during his travels from Judea to the Galilee. He singularly encounters a woman at the well of Jacob at the noon hour (the motif of Israelite courtship and betrothal should not go unnoticed here; for comparative biblical encounters, see Gen 24:10–49, 29:4–14; Exod 2:15–22; and Prot. Jas. 11.1). Jesus and the unnamed Samaritan woman enter into a contest of challenge and riposte about a life-giving fluid and fluid receptacles in which her marital history becomes the epicenter of her (perceived) shame—from her perspective—and Christian superiority—from Jesus's triumphant and foreign (i.e., non-Samaritan) missionizing perspective.

She, the *temporary* receptacle of the triumphant living water, transports the message to the villagers of her town, who go to the scene of the encounter to drink for themselves. Like the woman, they are more persuaded by the foreign (Jesus) than by the local (unnamed woman) and proclaim: "It is no longer because of what you [i.e., the woman] said that we believe, for we have heard [i.e., Jesus] for ourselves" (John 4:42). So as the woman discarded her (former) water receptacle at the feet of Jesus to deliver the living water to her fellow townspeople of Samaria, the townspeople also discard their original *living* water receptacle (i.e., the woman). Thus, both the woman and the townspeople demonstrate a form of cultural ambivalence that prioritizes foreign over regional, masculine over feminine, and Christian over Samaritan.

This ambivalence "refers to [the] simultaneous attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized" and is readily palpable through a Chicano optic in the John 4 narrative (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2000, 12; cf. Bhabha 1994, 85–92). We are initially instructed that Samaritans and Jews hold nothing in common; thus, the chance conversation at the well is culturally inappropriate (i.e., repulsive). Yet, the conclusion of the narrative brings Jesus into religious relationship with the Samaritan townspeople (i.e., attraction). Ultimately, it is the *woman* who is repulsed, demonstrating the narrative's construction of the foreign (Jesus, Jewish, living water) as more attractive than the local (unnamed woman, Samaritan, well water). Jesus is sought out and embraced as living water vessel, and the woman is explicitly rejected in her transformed role. In this case, ambivalence is skewed in favor of the foreign—a favoring common in imperial and colonial encounters (especially as informed by the tremendous discrepancies in power within colonial and imperial contact zones).

The dismissive words of the townspeople to the woman after their encounter with Jesus (as construction of the foreign narrator) align quite neatly with contemporary Chicano (and Mexican) interpretations of Spanish conquest and domination of the Americas when interrogated through the worldview of Hernán Cortés's indigenous mistress, Doña María (*la Malinche*). This feminine, vanquished archetype also echoes resoundingly with ancient artistic representations of conquered lands as vanquished, sexualized, and penetrated women. It is to these two archetypes that we now focus our attention.

*Malinchismo, la Malinche y sus hijos de la chingada*<sup>2</sup>

How has the interpretation of John 4 been influenced by the subjectivity of a Chicano interrogation, especially through the lens of *malinchismo*? *Malinchismo* here refers to the long-standing Mexican (and by extension, Chicano) self-deprecation for desiring all things foreign over all things local (i.e., indigenous or related to Mexican *mestizaje*; see Butler 2004 for further discussion). A *malinchista* reading is based on subsequent gender-violating interpretations of the historical figure Doña Maria (the Christian name given to the indigenous female interpreter, guide, confidante, and mistress of Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés), in conjunction with the subsequent mythology that developed around her as *la Malinche*. Therefore, one potential influence of a Chicano interrogation of John 4 is based on reception histories of both the historical Doña Maria and the mythology of *la Malinche* thus derived.

On the relationship between the historical and mythic, Sandra Cypress (1991, 2, 7) notes:

*La Malinche* has been transformed from a historical figure to a major Mexican and Latin American feminine archetype, a polysemous sign whose signifieds, for all their ambiguity, are generally negative.... Very few Mexicans before the modern period were willing to accept her as anything other than a prostitute or a traitor ... the individual who sells out to the foreigner, who devalues national identity in favor of imported benefits.

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2. Octavio Paz (1985, 73) defines *la chingada* as "the Mother forcibly opened, violated or deceived."

Mexican Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz (1985, 86) also foregrounds a long-standing Mexican—and by extension—Chicano sentiment:

If the *Chingada* is a representative of the violated Mother, it is appropriate to associate her with the Conquest, which was also a violation, not only in the historical sense but also in the flesh of Indian women. The symbol of this violation is *doña Malinche*, the mistress of Cortés. It is true that she gave herself voluntarily to the conquistador, but he forgot her as soon as her usefulness was over.... The Mexican people have not forgiven La Malinche for her betrayal.

Both the Samaritan woman and Doña Maria/*la Malinche* are associated with multiple male partners as *las chingadas*, the promiscuous and sexually penetrated ones, and are ultimately discarded after successful penetration. Paz (1985, 86, emphasis added) describes *la chingada* as the woman who "loses her name; she is no one, she *disappears* into nothingness, she is Nothingness." This attribution of nothingness parallels the feminine vessel discarded by her fellow Samaritans in John 4, who also disappears as a prominent actor in the story after the Samaritan villagers encounter the legitimate, masculine vessel of living water, Jesus.

Even more striking is the parallel between the Samaritan woman's multiple husbands and current male associate, who is not her husband (4:16–18), and the multiple male partners of *la Malinche*. Cypress (1991, 28) documents: "Because of her beauty and other excellent attributes, she was first given to a prominent conquistador, Alonso Hernández Puerto Carrero; when he left for Castile, she was transferred to [Hernán] Cortés, to whom she bore a son named Don Martín Cortés." After her deployment by Cortés in the conquest of Mexico, Cortés ultimately discarded her, and she married another Spaniard, named Juan Jaramillo (35–38).

Other similarities between the Samaritan woman in John 4 and Doña Maria/*la Malinche* are not difficult to discern. In fact, I categorize the similarities as striking. How could a Chicano reader not hear the echoes of the conquest event when faced with the Samaritan woman of John 4? The reverberations between the two cannot be ignored. In both stories, a woman is represented as being the conduit of regional penetration by a foreigner in the possession of a superior religiocultural knowledge.

To summarize the shared similarities between these two feminine archetypes, the following features should be noted:

1. The Samaritan woman is unnamed (this is an especially interesting feature given that in John 3, Jesus's encounter with the Jewish religious leader, the masculine actor is *named*: Nicodemus); the indigenous woman has multiple names, giving the impression of being nameless (her indigenous name is Malinal; her Christian name is Marina; her mythic name is *la Malinche*).
2. Both women come into contact with a foreign male figure who penetrates their homeland and delivers a nonindigenous religious and cultural system that is deemed superior by the penetrating male (i.e., first-century Christianity and sixteenth-century Roman Catholicism).
3. Both women are *used* as conduits and facilitators in the dissemination of this foreign message; in fact, both women are essential in their intermediary roles as message deliverers.
4. Both women are successful in the delivery of this message (Samaritans believe and Mexico is conquered).
5. Both women—based on patriarchal interpretations of these events—have had their marital/sexual past used as devaluation markers of their own character (i.e., both have had multiple male marital/sexual partners).
6. Based on these devaluations, the male actors (Jesus and Cortés) are promoted as the primary deliverers of *living water* at the expense of the now-expendable female receptacles.

I do not boast about any special insight here in the interpretation of this passage, and I have certainly not made a career as a biblicalist on Johannine literature. However, I offer a subjective, minoritized reading of the unit from John 4 through my own cultural subjectivity as a Chicano male, which, by extension of my Mexican heritage, also makes me a *hijo de la gran chingada* (an offspring of the violently penetrated Mexico). This experience of colonization embodies who I am as a son of Mexico. Like Samaritans, we are a suspiciously mixed-race people and are glanced on by our regional neighbors with up-turned noses. We are *mestizo*, impure, unclean, colonial mimics, and objects of ambivalent suspicion. How can I not read this passage as a violation of a land, a people, and a woman?

The only manner in which to read the narrative otherwise is for me to step outside myself, to read this passage as a proverbial Uncle Tom (or the Mexican equivalent, Tio Taco), validating the foreign above my regional. Such is the price of accepting the gospel in Samaria and Mexico. We are



asked to overlook our collective violation as a *fait accompli* in the successful spread of the Christian message ("Onward Christian Soldiers"). We are asked to assume the posture of religiocultural receptacles. Feminized, degraded in this masculine, penetrating Christian-mandated missionary position. The echoes of this dominant, colonizing (i.e., missionizing) worldview reverberate strongly today, given the canonization of Junípero Serra, the facilitator of the California mission system, to the chagrin of many indigenous peoples and like-minded sympathizers who view Serra as an instrument of violating Spanish colonization of the southwest United States. Thus, we are asked to accept and celebrate foreign penetration and the subsequent canonization of our penetrators. The good news is also *bad news* and comes at a high price for Samaria, Mexico, and the southwest United States, a region that was once Mexico!

#### The Vanquished Woman Motif: Penetrated Lands and Conquered Peoples

The interrogation of John 4 through the lens of Chicano *malinchismo* is theoretically not a large conceptual shift for the modern interpreter, if viewed through a secondary lens of ancient Roman artistic representations of masculinized military conquest and the dominated feminine. Roman art, or visual imagery, from the early Christian era is described by Paul Zanker (1990, 3) as part of a cultural renewal program that reflected "a society's inner life and gives insight into a people's values and imagination that often cannot be apprehended in literary sources." The imagery of the early Christian era was an artistic renewal program employed to reflect positive Roman attitudes on the golden era of the Augustan age.

One central motif in that representation was the depiction of Roman military conquest as a hypermasculine affair (i.e., aggressive, dominant, and violent) and those territories dominated as feminine (i.e., passive, subdued, sexualized, and penetrated). One such artistic depiction is the relief of Emperor Claudius subduing the feminized Britannia from the Augustan temple at Aphrodisias. Here the description of this relief by Davina López (2008, 1) is most illuminating:

A man and a woman are carved in high relief. The man is almost naked except for a cloak and a military helmet. He is holding the woman down with his knee, and it looks as if he is about to violate her sexually or kill her. No matter the action, the scene depicted is clearly violent. The

female figure is also scantily clad, her right breast is bared, and she looks out since her head is being held up by the man's left hand. The couple is identified by an inscription: the man is emperor Claudius; the woman is Britannia. She represents the territory and people of Britain—the islands north of the European mainland. She is an image of the nation called Britannia.

López's assessment of this relief highlights the "relationship between sexual humiliation and military conquest" (44).

López continues her assessment of these gendered and sexualized Roman artistic depictions of military conquest with an analysis of the breastplate of an Augustan statue from Prima Porta (first century CE). Depicted on the breastplate of the victorious Augustus is a Parthian man returning a captured Roman standard, demonstrative of the Parthians' defeat by the Romans during Augustan military campaigns. Here again, López (2008, 40, 42) describes the depiction as follows: "The Parthian's stance, dress and passivity betray effeminacy. He is a 'girly man,' representing an entire nation of the same.... [The peace between Rome and the Parthians] is dependent on relations of domination and subordination, communicated visually as naturalized power relations between male and female (including passive, penetrated male) bodies." In contrast to the female depiction of subdued Britannia, the Roman conquest of Parthia is visually represented by a subdued and feminized male figure. Once again, victorious and dominant Rome is depicted in aggressive masculine tones, whereas the defeated Parthians are represented as dominated, effeminate men.

The early imperial period has no shortage of these types of gendered representations wherein Roman military strength (virility) and conquest are framed by the masculine and dominated peoples, and conquered lands are depicted as feminine, effeminate, and subdued victims. Other such examples include, but are not limited to, the following: *Judaea Capta* coinage, where the defeated Jewish people are predominantly depicted as "captured, bound, draped and seated female bodies" (López 2008, 36); and Nero's defeat of the personified (i.e., female) Armenia located in the Sebasteion of Aphrodisias, which depicts Nero (accompanied by Nike) standing over a nude and thoroughly subdued and feminized Armenia.

This visual language of the early empire went to great lengths in depicting Roman military might and success as a masculine enterprise, "a Roman defined, male-dominated hierarchy.... The [barbarian] nation's

collective femininity is not only humiliating, but contributes to the definition and reinforcement of Roman masculinity" (López 2008, 37). This was the visual language of empire when the author of John wrote "his" gospel.

Conclusion: "It Is No Longer Because of What You Said ..."

For long I have been uncomfortable with the simultaneous foregrounding of John 4 as a classic example of the successful spreading of the Christian message in a gentile region, and my reflexive suspicion and repulsion of it. For a missionizing religion, how could this text be seen as anything other than the triumphant dissemination of the salvific message of Jesus Christ going into the world? From a Christian perspective, it is iconic. John 4 is a mandate and template for future Christian missionary activity. In effect, *the good news will successfully penetrate even in othered, hostile territories*—"Onward Christian Soldiers"; your destiny has manifested itself. However, through the lens of a Chicano optic I hear a different story.

The echoes of Christian conquests in the Americas and the misappropriation of feminine symbols in my cultural history require me to interrogate this story with greater suspicion. That suspicion is enhanced with the violent wording of the religiously *transformed* Samaritan villagers: "It is no longer because of what you said ...". Surely, the author of the Gospel of John and subsequent redactors must have noted the rhetorical violence they were enacting on the Samaritan woman. From a rhetorical perspective the narrative would have remained as effective as a missionizing mandate even if verse 42 had been altogether left out. Yet, there it stands in all of its canonical authority. The vanquished, penetrated woman, cast aside.

Ultimately, her role in the narrative is important for the author. She is an archetype. She is the embodiment of the penetrated feminine so important for ancient visual and rhetorical culture as well as subsequent narratives of penetration and domination in conquest narratives. She is the violated, dominated, and expendable receptacle required by masculine depictions of dominant penetrations. She is conquered, she is violated, she is submissive, and, unfortunately for the tradition that would emerge around her, she is *now* Christian.

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## Water Is a Human Right, but It Ain't Free: A Womanist Reading of John 4:1–42

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Context always matters. In the summer of 2014, the city of Detroit began shutting off water to thousands of residential customers unable to pay their water bills, while service to businesses with past due accounts in the tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars remained uninterrupted (Chapman 2014). The city of Detroit is not the only city to shut off water to residents; other cities in Michigan, such as Hamtramck, as well as the cities of Baltimore and St. Louis have done the same (Wisely 2014). When Detroit residents were deprived of access to water, local activists, churches, and nonprofit organizations scrambled to provide them with water for drinking, hygiene, sanitation, and cooking. People around the United States and beyond, including neighboring Canada, also assisted in the humanitarian crises (Helms 2014).

One of my students, who works with a local nonprofit created specifically to respond to the water-shutoff crises, asked me to write something about it on my blog, and I did. Other colleagues and I also delivered water and donated funds to buy water. A few businesses opened their doors for people to use their facilities for bathing. A human being can survive for weeks without food but for only a few days without water. Our individual responses prove crucial for people denied access to water, because they cannot keep up with the rising costs. In November, for example, a man reported on a Facebook post that he had seen his water bill triple in a matter of months. He went from paying \$100 every three months for water to paying \$100 every month in a short time. Stories like these

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This essay first appeared in *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (In)Justice, Intersectionality and Biblical Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018). It is used here by permission of Wipf & Stock Publishers, [www.wipfandstock.com](http://www.wipfandstock.com).

abound. Yet, our efforts are like trying to put expired adhesive bandages on gaping, fatal wounds.

Confronted by these wounds, I attempt to read John 4:1–42 anew with a womanist lens—a lens that considers issues of race, gender, class and neocolonialism, that privileges and values the lives and experiences of Black women. The womanist lens through which I read the story of the encounter between the Samaritan woman and Jesus contends that racism, sexism, and classism are interlocking oppressions. In addition to the tridimensional oppression that Black women experience, this essay employs a postcolonial critique, which entails a consideration of the impact of colonialism and neocolonialism on contexts and texts. Historically, colonialism, capitalism, and religious ideologies have been merged to create an incubator and foundation for structures that allow for the discrimination of minorities on the basis of race, sex, and class.

Too many readers have treated Jesus's revelation about the Samaritan woman's domestic history and current living situation as the most significant aspect of the narrative, particularly since the woman responds by identifying Jesus as a prophet. I argue that a more remarkable revelation occurs earlier in the narrative, when Jesus claims to possess living water, which the Samaritan woman can possess merely by asking for it. When Jesus makes this claim, access to water is being contested within the framework of ethnic/racial and gender difference. Also, the dialog between Jesus and the Samaritan woman signifies a shared cultural recognition of water as a human right, regardless of race/ethnicity, class, or gender.

### The Womanist Lens: Water Is a Human Right, but It Ain't Free!

According to the 2010 US Census data, 82.7 percent of the city of Detroit is Black non-Hispanic, 6.8 percent is Hispanic, and 10.6 percent is white (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). Between the 2000 and 2010 census data, the city of Detroit experienced a dramatic 25 percent decline in population. (During the same period, Chicago experienced a 7 percent decline and Cleveland a 17 percent decline [Southeast Michigan Council of Governments 2011]). The figures show that 26 percent of the population is under eighteen years of age and 52.7 percent is female. The average number of occupants in a house is 2.7, with a median household income of \$26,955. That figure is much lower than the median household income for the state of Michigan, which is \$48,471. Thirty-eight percent of persons living in the city of Detroit are below the poverty level. We do not know

how many languish at cents above the superficial poverty level. That rate is more than double the percentage of 16.3 percent living below the poverty level in the state of Michigan. Most likely, given the city's demographics, the majority of Detroiters impacted by the water shutoffs are poor, Black, and female with children.

In March 2013, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder appointed an emergency manager for the city of Detroit, and in July 2013 Detroit became the largest city in the United States to file for bankruptcy. When an emergency manager is appointed, a city's elected officials are forced to yield significant powers to the emergency manager. The emergency manager began his job in Detroit with sweeping powers, thanks to a revised state law governing emergency managers, which was enacted the same week the Detroit emergency manager started work in Detroit. Many citizens regarded the seizure of power by the state as "unconstitutional" and "undemocratic" (Davey 2013). (In November 2014, the emergency manager announced that his job was almost complete; the bankruptcy plan for the city was approved.) The institution of the revised laws regarding the state takeover of cities such as Detroit and the appointment of the emergency manager with sweeping powers has also been called "domestic neocolonialism" (Rice 2013). The latest impact of this domestic neocolonialism under the emergency manager has been the shutoff of water to thousands of Detroit residents—a move that disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable and poor in the city.

In April 2014, the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department began shutting off water to thousands of Detroiters whose water rates had more than doubled over the past ten years. The department shut off water to seven thousand separate residential customers between April and June. That same June the city approved an 8.7 percent increase in water rates (Guillen 2014). The poorest citizens were not exempt. At one point, a short moratorium was granted by the courts before the department resumed shutting off water. Anyone who owed \$150 (by some accounts less) or who was sixty days in arrears was slated to have their water shut off (Pyke 2014). Activists, churches, nonprofits, and individual citizens scrambled to purchase bottled water, donate, and set up stations to receive water for their neighbors. Payment plans were made available to some residents, but what happens when people cannot make the payments and/or who sign up for plans they know they cannot afford? (Semuels 2014).

In October 2014, special rapporteurs (independent investigators) from the United Nations visited Detroit to hear from the residents themselves, to

hear their stories in their own words. Activists had taken the struggle to the United Nations steps and to national media outlets. Prior to the arrival of the special rapporteurs, the United Nations issued a news release in which it referred to the water shutoffs in Detroit as a violation of human rights: "Disconnection of water services because of failure to pay due to lack of means constitutes a violation of the human right to water and other international human rights.... Because of a high poverty rate and a high unemployment rate, relatively expensive water bills in Detroit are unaffordable for a significant portion of the population" (Trainor 2014, 1).

In a historic move, on 28 July 2010 the UN General Assembly had recognized water and sanitation as a human right. The resolution passed with a unanimous vote (i.e., no "no" votes), but with forty-one countries abstaining. Bolivia's Ambassador to the United Nations, Pablo Solon, spoke to the United Nations on that day. In that speech Ambassador Solon orally amended the UN resolution to read "recognized" instead of "declared" as an acknowledgment of the preexisting understanding of water as a human right. Access to water did not become a human right with the UN declaration; it was already presumed to be a human right. The UN declaration had the impact of fully recognizing water and sanitation as an independent right rather than as only an element or component "of other rights such as 'the right to an adequate standard of living'" or the "right to life" (Solon 2010). Ambassador Solon reminded the assembly that individuals can survive for weeks without food but only a few days without water, about 65 percent of our bodies, including our blood and brains, that are water. Further, he reminded them, *inter alia*, that more deaths result from illnesses caused by lack of drinking water and sanitation than by war, and that globally about one in eight people still lack potable water (United Nations n.d., 1). With cities in the United States such as Detroit shutting off water to the poorest residents, that number will increase in developed countries if this practice continues.

The "second operative paragraph" of the resolution "calls upon States and international organizations to provide financial resources; capacity-building and technology transfer through international assistance and cooperation, in particular to developing countries, in order to scale up efforts to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all" (United Nations n.d., 2). For individuals who do not make a living wage, "affordable drinking water" will have to be free drinking water. "It is necessary," Ambassador Solon argued, "to call on states to



promote and protect the human right to drinking water and sanitation" (United Nations n.d., 3).

In light of the global recognition that water is a human right and in light of the ongoing water crises in Detroit and other cities, globally, where many of my students and/or our neighbors live, I read the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. I do so through a womanist lens, valuing and prioritizing Black women's experiences, and within an interpretative framework that privileges justice and wholeness for the larger Black community as well as the global community. Womanism promotes and strives for the health and wholeness of the entire community. Thus, Raquel St. Clair (2007) asserts that womanist biblical hermeneutics is a hermeneutics of wholeness, one that is not complicit in the oppression of Black women or of anyone else.

#### "Give Me Water!": Mutuality and Hospitality

When Jesus stops and rests by the well in Sychar, instead of going into the city with his disciples to purchase food, his actions signify the priority and importance of water for his survival and for human survival generally. Jesus stops at noon, when he is tired and likely parched. The Samaritan woman arrives at noon because it is at noon that she needs water. Noon, when the sun is quite hot, may have been an unusual time of day to draw water, as some commentators assert, but people do what they have to do and when they have to do it. Maybe noon on this day was the day a single mother could leave home to get water to meet the needs of her household; possibly it is her second or third trek to the well when she encounters Jesus at noon; perhaps it is her last visit to the well for the day, or maybe her first of many. Maybe her visit to the well in the heat of the day was not what a more privileged person would do, but maybe it was routine for her—the beginning, the middle, or the end of her routine, depending on how many times she needs to draw water for drinking, bathing, food preparation, and sanitation. According to the United Nations (n.d.), in developing countries in excess of two hundred million hours of women's time is consumed daily by collecting and transporting water for domestic purposes. We draw water when we need it. Human need transcends time, money, and opportunity.

The sociohistorical context of the encounter between the Samaritan woman and Jesus at the well is not, as many commentators suggest, a betrothal scene void of a betrothal (O'Day 1995, 656). Andrew Arterbury

argues persuasively for a sociohistorical framework of hospitality rather than the betrothal context as put forth by Robert Alter (1981; also Alter 1978). Arterbury argues that what Alter describes, and others have followed, is really hospitality. The end result of hospitality was often the giving of a gift to the guest or stranger, and sometimes that gift was a father's daughter as a bride, but not all hospitality relationships ended in a betrothal (Arterbury 2010, 74, 77)—though sometimes hospitality has also resulted in the taking and ravishing of a virgin daughter and a wife, as in Judg 19. When Jesus instructs the Samaritan woman to call her husband, he is not initiating a betrothal, but his “instructions follow the logical progression of events that generally take place when a stranger seeks hospitality. Namely, the Samaritan woman is expected to direct the stranger to a hospitable home or to initiate the process whereby the head of her household will extend an offer of hospitality” (77). However, of course, Jesus has taken the initiative and not the woman, and this may be because of the hostilities that existed between the two ethnic groups that they represent.

In the second century BCE, the Jewish king John Hyrcanus invaded the Samaritan city of Shechem and destroyed the Samaritan temple. Samaritans rejected a Jerusalem-centered religion (Williamson and Kartveit 1992). “The more homogeneous Judeans looked upon their northern kin as stained by the blood and customs of their captors” (Anderson 1980, 218). By 107 BCE Hyrcanus had sent most of the people back to the city of Samaria, but a residual community remained in Sychar and Neopolis around the base of Gerizim (219). Such was the state of relations between Judeans and Samaritans when Jesus met woman at the well. Within a generation of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, Samaritans fleeing Roman oppression gathered at Mount Gerizim holding the Romans at bay for a month, when water ran out and they either died of thirst or were slaughtered by the Roman soldiers (219).

As Adele Reinhartz (1998, 572) asserts, according to the narrative, by asking the woman for water, Jesus crosses ethnic boundaries and social boundaries when he speaks to her. At the same time, I would argue that when Jesus asks the woman about her husband, this may be the narrator's roundabout way of paralleling the Samaritan woman's story with the encounter between Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:10–11). As Gail O'Day (1995, 565) notes, “in both stories a man interrupts a woman engaged in household work to request a gesture of hospitality,” thus furthering the continuity between Jesus and the prophetic tradition. Yet also in both texts, the context is journey and the lack of/need for water:

the demand for water from the prophet initiates the encounter, and the encounter takes places at a boundary marker (the city gate for Elijah, and Jacob's well for Jesus). Neither Elijah nor Jesus is seeking a wife for himself or for anybody else, and both women are living with or taking care of a male who is not her husband.

Just as Elijah demands water from the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:10c), so Jesus does not ask for water but demands it: "Give me [some water] to drink" (*Δος μοι πειν*, 4:7, my translation). The verb form *Δος* is aorist imperative; the imperative mood is the grammatical mood of demand or command. Jesus commands that the Samaritan woman give him water based on a basic human need within a culture of expected hospitality among human beings, particularly toward the stranger and vulnerable person in their midst (e.g., Deut 17:18). Jesus uses the language of hospitality. Jesus's demand signifies a shared cultural understanding of hospitality; this hospitality transcends ethnic, religious, class, and gender boundaries. The narrative alerts the reader that Jesus's disciples went into the city to buy food and thus chose not to chance acquiring food and water (hospitality) among the rural people in Sychar. We are left, therefore, with a single weary male traveler rather than a group of men, which makes Jesus's request for hospitality more difficult to ignore and to deny—one human being calling on another human being to meet a human need, irrespective of gender, ethnicity/race, or class.

We can conceive of the disciples collectively as representing a system or a structure of bias. Structures and systems based in discriminatory difference are more difficult to permeate, to transcend and/or dismantle, as manifested by the collective, homogenous response of the disciples when they see Jesus interacting with the Samaritan woman (John 4:27–33). Apparently, the disciples did not expect anyone in Sychar to provide free hospitality to Jesus, seemingly on the grounds of ethnic and religious difference. They assumed no one would transcend the millennial-old boundaries of mutual hostility and discrimination. Sychar, ancient Shechem, consisted of an ethnically/racially homogenous population of Samaritans who were historically a mixed brood (2 Kgs 17).

However, Jesus's story of needing water, his-story, transcends their inimical history, just as human need transcends ethnicity/race, gender, and class. The Samaritan woman responds to Jesus's demand with a question: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (John 4:9). Despite Jesus's use of the language of demand, she understands it as a request for hospitality, from one racial/ethnic person to another. The

focus of her question is not on his maleness but on his racial-ethnic affiliation, on his Jewishness in relation to the request. The difference she raises is not one of gender or of class but of race/ethnicity.

The narrator informs the readers of the discrimination of the Jews toward the Samaritans: “(Jews do not share things in common [συγχαρομαι]<sup>1</sup> with Samaritans)” (4:9b). Verse 11 implies that the thing that Jews do not share with Samaritans is drinking vessels.

The narrator informs his audience of a subtext of discrimination on the grounds of what is pure and impure, an ancient, invisible structure that is often manifest at the crossroads of human need and the allocation and/or reception of resources. The subtext at work in the passage could paralyze one in the face of human need and the necessary human response of hospitality. The shared experiences of Jews and Samaritans include the expectation not only of hospitality toward the stranger within their gates but also of justified discrimination. Samaritanism is a form of Judaism (4:12, 20; Gen 33:18–20; 2 Kgs 17). As Teresa Okure (2009, 416) asserts, the “shared experiences of prejudice, racism, and sexism flowing from the social norms of their societies” surfaced.

How the Samaritan woman knows that Jesus is a Jew remains unclear; maybe we are to presume he identified himself as a Jew. At John 8:48, Jesus is accused by “the Jews” as being a Samaritan and having a demon; he categorically denies having a demon but does not address the former accusation. After the Samaritan woman raises the obvious question of ethnic difference, Jesus reveals his divine connection and his ability, for the asking, to allocate living water to her (4:10). She responds in the same language of hospitality in the imperative mood: “Give me to drink” (Δος μοι πειν, 4:11, my translation). The water Jesus offers the Samaritan woman is free, like what he expects from her is free—water is life-giving and -sustaining substance. The woman would love not to have to make several trips a day to the well to draw water. Although Jesus may have in mind spiritual water, spiritual water cannot substitute for access to physical water.

Yung Suk Kim (2014, 39) argues that “in the socio-religious context of discrimination, the metaphor of spiritual water can be understood as collapsing the hostile barriers between Jews and gentiles in that the water symbolizes abundant life and equality for all.” However, I argue that Jesus’s

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1. For a discussion of the meaning of this Greek word as “to use something together with another person” in John, see Daube 1950.

offer of living water to the Samaritan woman, with whom he shares the experience of colonization under the Roman Empire, signifies a point of convergence and of correspondence for colonized peoples who can have access to water, living water, independent of their colonizers. Thus, living water functions as a unifying metaphor, transcending its symbolism—a metaphor of interdependence between two colonized peoples and freedom from total dependence on the Roman Empire as colonizer.

Kim (2014, 39) further argues that the abundant life for all offered by the living water “includes personal, communal, and global aspects of life: as seen in the expansion from the Samaritan woman, to her village, and to the world.” However, I differ and argue that within this global framework living water is more than a spiritual reality but becomes a physical right as well based on its significance for human life. Who can live an abundant life without the necessities of life? John’s Jesus does not spiritualize away or trivialize the resources, such as water and nourishment, that people need for daily sustenance (2:1–11). If John’s Jesus adjusts his schedule to provide wine from water for a wedding feast, surely he is concerned that humans have access to physical water. Indeed, he stopped at Sychar because of his need to quench his physical thirst for water.

### The Politics of Water: Living Water, Classism, and a Postcolonial Optic

The planned water shutoffs to tens of thousands of Detroiters may be a prelude to the privatization of water (Public Citizen n.d.). The control and allocation of water is political and always privileges the wealthiest consumers. Inga Winkler (2014, 7), a legal adviser to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation, argues, “Addressing the crisis in the lack of access of water requires, of course, water resources.... Yet above all, it requires the political will to use these resources in a way to prioritise basic human needs.” Addressing such a crisis is thus both a management and a political issue. Winkler (7) further argues that although sufficient water exists “to satisfy the basic household requirement of all people, the entire societal demand for water often exceeds availability; thus, competing interests request that we set priorities for allocating water for the purpose of meeting basic human needs.”

Privatization of water is a form of neocolonialism wherein interest in profits trumps sustainable solutions and human need. When private companies privilege profits and stock/stakeholder approval, there is little, if any, concern for the public good and customer satisfaction. Profits are

aggressively pursued at the expense of water quality and customer care. Further, rather than protecting existing supplies, enhancing conservation efforts, helping vulnerable populations, curtailing pollution, and raising public consciousness, increasingly government officials are resorting to privatization. Since water is not a luxury item that people can live without, customers are pressured to either pay the higher prices resulting from privatization or go without access to water. In fact, the World Bank has made privatization of water a requirement of loaning money to countries (Private Citizen n.d.). According to Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke (2004), the World Bank has promoted the commodification of water for some time, leaving millions of people without water. In 2004 there were ten major corporations delivering water and wastewater services to over three hundred million customers in one hundred countries, and the number of countries continues to grow exponentially. Estimates showed that by 2014 the top three providers would control 70 percent of the market in Europe and North America. The World Bank has been the principal financier of privatized water and has required the privatization of water by countries seeking loans for water. Privatization has resulted in higher prices, lack of transparency, corruption, shutoffs for customers unable to pay, diminished water quality, and large profits. Countries such as Senegal and South Africa have turned off water to tens of millions of people, many of whom have been forced to use untreated water.

In our text, as in other contexts and texts, access to water is political. Because water is necessary for life, people form alliances in order to obtain greater access to water. In prophetic oracles, Israel and/or Judah are accused of forsaking God, the source and provider of living water, in order to have what they perceive as greater access to the precious resource. In a vision of Deutero-Zechariah of the eschatological day of the Lord, a late fifth-century BCE prophecy regarding the return of the colonized exiles to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and temple, the exiles are promised a future in which the city will have unbridled access to living water. Zechariah 14:8 LXX states that “living waters [ὕδωρ ζῶν] will flow out of Jerusalem.” The Greek construction in the LXX is the same as at John 4:10 (ὕδωρ ζῶν). The vision is a promise of independence in the midst of their colonialization; they will not need to depend on their colonizers for the most valuable and needful substance for all life. At Jer 2:13 LXX, Yahweh is referred to as a “well [πηγήν] of living water [ὕδατος ζῶης]” in an oracle to the house of Israel because they committed two evils: they (1) forsook Yahweh as the fountain of living water, giving their allegiance to other gods and nations,

and (2) dug cisterns for themselves that hold no water. Similarly, at Jer 17:13 LXX, Judah is said to have forsaken the “fountain of life [πηγην ζωης], Yahweh.”

In John 7:38 the Greek construction is the same as in John 4:10 (υδατος ζωντος) with the use of the participle, except here it is genitive, “Out of the believer’s belly shall flow rivers of living water” (my translation) because he trusts in God (the thirsty one who comes to Jesus shall drink). Thus, living water is free-flowing water from a natural source like a fountain versus stagnant water that might be drawn from a cistern (water tank) or well. Jesus’s offer to give the Samaritan woman living water just for the asking, free of charge, is a subversive anticolonial gesture. What Jesus offers transcends water sources attributed to humans, including but not limited to Jacob’s well (4:12–15). Both Jesus and the Samaritan woman belong to peoples colonized under the Roman Empire. While religious differences divide them, their colonial oppression unites them and can be seen as the medium for building or mending their ethnic/racial-theological differences.

Roman urban centers, like Greek cities, relied on a continuous flow of water rather than expecting water on demand as in our society. The result may have been a lot of wasted water, but the constant flow of water constituted the only option, since aqueducts could not be switched on and off (Fagan 2011, 184). The Romans excelled in channeling water through rough terrain and across broad plains, which often surrounded their cities. Most of the water from Roman aqueducts, about 17 percent, was consumed for public baths. In Rome, wells and cisterns could be found in houses, except in the case of rural dwellers. The emperor had the responsibility to provide water, but sometimes the wealthy paid for and constructed their own aqueducts. In 19 BCE Marcus Vispanius Agrippa, a prominent statesman, constructed the Aqua Virgo for his own private baths (Fagan 2011, 194).

Rome was the first major city characterized by its management of drinking water. The Romans relied on the ideas of many of their foreign predecessors, but they were famous for their aqueducts, which carried water via natural gravity, nonstop massive amounts of water daily to Roman cities. The first Roman aqueduct, the Appia, was constructed in 312 BCE, and ten others were added within five centuries. The aqueducts ensured a steady, continuous flow of water to public baths and lavish fountains, and for private homes that could afford to pay taxes on the spigot. The tax, the *vectigal*, was based on the size of the spigot. The *vectigal* helped to pay for



the maintenance of the water system; water itself was free, but customers of piped water paid for the delivery of the water into their homes. “To the average Roman resident ... water in the city was available by right, as free for the taking as water from the Tiber River” (Salzman 2012, 54–56).

Archaeological evidence from the ruins of the Roman city of Pompeii dated around 79 CE shows that piped water was a luxury, and access to piped water was potentially a status symbol of wealth and influence (Jones and Robinson 2005). New archaeological evidence from excavations in Pompeii, particularly regarding the House of the Vestals, demonstrates that in the last part of the first century BCE piped pressurized water and water features associated with access to pressurized piped water were a sign of luxury and opulence. Prior to the introduction of piped water via aqueducts, water was used moderately. Thus, “a private supply of piped water to a household was costly and available only to a certain sector of society. It is within this context that its role as a luxury product arose and that its ostentatious use in the definition and promotion of social status” is viewed (Jones and Robinson 2005, 699). Still, the urban population had access to public water supply through huge, elaborately decorated water basins. People living in rural areas, like the Samaritan woman, had access to water via cisterns and wells. *Lacus* or public water basins were placed in Roman cities for the benefit of the public, who would gather, as at a well, and draw water freely. However, the amount of water a person could draw from the *lacus* was limited by the effort and time it took to carry the water from the *lacus* to one’s home. The number of *lacus* increased exponentially under Emperor Augustus, from ninety-one to about six hundred. Augustus made an indelible political statement increasing public access to water through *lacus*.

As Augustus was the first emperor after the murder of Julius Caesar, the imperial gesture of providing increased public access to water quite possibly served as a reminder to “the common people that they received their water from imperial beneficence in the name of their ruler.... The Romans’ right to water was acknowledged, ensured, and enhanced as *Aqua Nomine Caesaris*—water in the name of Caesar” (Salzman 2012, 56–57). Yet, Rome’s aqueducts could not have been built without the labor of copious numbers of war prisoners and/or the enslaved. The ability of Rome’s leaders to construct the aqueducts achieved for them a prestige that “defined political relationships between the rulers and the ruled” (Fagan 2011, 197). When the Roman Empire collapsed, the aqueducts eventually ceased to flow, and what remained were traditional sources of water, such



as wells and cisterns, which did not require an abundance of prisoners and enslaved labor (197).

Thus, for Jesus to offer living water to the Samaritan woman may well have been a subversive, anticolonial, political proposition. We might presume that, in her testimony to her neighbors, the Samaritan woman told them about Jesus's offer of living water. Further, maybe the Samaritan people who responded to her testimony and went to meet Jesus had made this political connection and had to see for themselves. Indeed, they proclaim Jesus to be the "savior of the world" (4:42). As Craig Koester (1990) argues, the title "savior of the world" was subversive to the Roman emperor, giving sovereignty to Jesus and not to Rome or Caesar—a sovereignty that Yahweh desired to have from ancient Israel, but instead too often ancient Israel chose to politically align itself with those who ostensibly controlled the water.

#### (Neo)Colonial Discourse and Stereotypes: Sexually Immoral and Lazy Women

The Samaritan woman has been and continues to be the victim of stereotyping. Many commentators and readers have stereotyped and/or demonized the Samaritan woman based on her marital history and current living arrangement; she is considered sexually immoral and/or hypersexual, and therefore summarily condemned. In a patriarchal society, women's activities in the domestic sphere generally serve to characterize or sum up their entire lives. Ernst Haenchen (1984, 221) correctly argues that "how the woman came to be married five times holds no significance for the story"; the author does not elaborate on her marital history. Similarly, Reinhartz (1998, 573) states that Jesus has shown no interest "in her sexual history *per se*." More significantly, Jesus presciently reveals her story, a portion of which the narrator shares with the audience; her marital history and present living situation are only a small portion of her story. As voyeurs peering and reading into the story what is not stated, and therefore not factual, as if it were truth, readers have often stereotyped the Samaritan woman as sexually immoral.

Many have characterized her in ways that neither she, nor Jesus, nor the narrator has done. Various readers conclude that Jesus reveals her "immoral life" (Beasley-Murray 1987, 61); that Jesus exposed her current "sinful situation" (Moloney 1998, 127; Higgs 2008), her "sexual irregularities ... [or] evil deeds" (Tenney 1981, 11), her "scandalous past" (Boyd

2004, 54); that she visits the well at noon because of “public shame” (McLeod 2008). Emmanuel McCall (2011, 587) writes, “She was a social outcast. The scripture does not say this, but she was probably an attractive woman. She was at least capable of attracting five husbands.... She was seen as a ‘serial fornicator.’ And perhaps, the secret envy of other women.” McCall continues by stating, “[Jesus] not only revealed her past, described her present, but like a teacher at a marking board, he wiped the surface clean. What Jesus cleans is always sanitized” (589). Even if readers determine the Samaritan woman’s current domestic situation to be ostensibly innocuous or harmless, they still ultimately default on the side of characterizing her as a sinner woman whom Jesus saved, as has happened with some of my students in my gospels course. Many readers have either explicitly or implicitly stereotyped the woman as guilty of sexual sin and/or as hypersexual.

The creation of stereotypes is a convenient way to withhold resources from people and/or to treat them in discriminatory ways based on negative difference. Homi Bhabha (1994, 96) asserts that “the construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference—racial and sexual.” In order to justify the shutting off of water to people who cannot pay the rising costs of water, delinquent customers are discursively stereotyped as lazy, deadbeats who have too many children and do not want to work and/or pay their utility bills. Historically, African American women have been stereotyped as hypersexual and as lazy, from enslavement through to the present.

In the early 1990s and beyond Black women were stereotyped as hypersexual, lazy Jezebels through the myth of the welfare queen (see Hancock 2004). More recently, poor Black women and their families who have been the victims of the city of Detroit’s water shutoffs have been depicted by some middle- and upper-class folks across racial lines, including within the media, explicitly and implicitly as lazy and/or hypersexual—or as welfare queens. Under the myth of the welfare queen, all minoritized women are the same: they are not individuals with life stories. They are not deserving of having their basic human needs met, because they are characterized as lazy women who cannot control themselves sexually and who thus keep popping out babies they cannot take care of. They are considered to be primarily Black, Latina, and other minoritized poor women of color. While most women on welfare are poor white women, poor Black women became the face of welfare and were dubbed by President Ronald Reagan

in 1992 as welfare queens. Welfare queens are Black women and women of color who are hypersexualized and lazy and, therefore, unworthy of public welfare and compassion. Such stereotypes justify the denial of basic rights, including the right to water for Black women and their families, despite their inability to meet the rising cost of utilities. If they owe \$150 (and by some accounts less), their water can be shut off and they should be left to suffer and die with little or no protest.

Some readers cannot escape the mythical story about the Samaritan woman, repeating as putative knowledge or truth the gospel about her sexually checkered past and her present dilemma of “shacking up” with a man who is not her husband, despite the absence of facts in the narrative supporting such so-called knowledge. Readers are expected to know who or what she is, and yet they must be told repetitively by interpreters that she is immoral, that Jesus saved her. This is how the stereotype functions, according to Bhabha (1994), as ambivalence, a central process of stereotyping. Ambivalence is the nervous repetition of something that is supposed to be known already. The stereotype has to be repeated to be reinforced. The *force of ambivalence* gives the colonial stereotype its common acceptance. “Colonial discourse,” Bhabha (1994, 101) states, “produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible.”

Thus, the stereotype of the Samaritan woman by commentators and preachers has functioned by the productive ambivalence of discourse: the ambivalence between what was supposedly known from the text—that she was a hypersexual, loose woman, guilty of sexual sin and thus needed to be, and was saved, by Jesus—and the anxious repetition of this supposed truth or fact. In the case of the Samaritan woman, commentators have enhanced the representation of the otherness of the woman by articulating sexual difference, in addition to the ethnic or racial difference already stated in the text. According to Bhabha (1994, 95), one can only displace a stereotyped image by “engaging with its *effectivity*,” that which gives it its power—its ability to produce a result.

Bhabha (1994, 75) further argues that “the stereotype is a simplification ... because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation.” Thus, the Negro remains a Negro wherever he goes (Fanon 1994). The Samaritan woman remains a sexually immoral woman in many pulpits and Bible studies, in some commentaries, and in the “beauty and barber shop” conversations of religious folks. Women who do not conform to our religious beliefs and behaviors of the dominant religion and custodians of

the myths are automatically presumed sexually impure and immoral. Indeed, Reinhartz (2001) suggests, "It may be more natural to read it [her marital history and status] as a reflection of the stereotype that Samaritan women are impure and immoral." The repetition of the stereotype also has consequences. Thus, Bhabha (1994, 111) states, "The same stories are told again and again and afresh—both gratifying and terrifying." In colonial discourses, the Black person's skin, his race, remains "an ineradicable sign of *negative difference*.... For the stereotype impedes the circulation or articulation of the signifier of 'race' as anything other than its *fixity* as racism" (108). For poor Black women, it is their skin, gender, and class; for the Samaritan woman, her five husbands and the one she is now living with are a *fixity*.

In the welfare-queen debates and in the water crises in Detroit, people assumed they already knew the stories of the women and families who were adversely impacted. In Detroit some people did not get to tell their stories until the independent investigators representing the United Nations arrived and held hearings. Persons such as the emergency manager, Kevin Orr, have said that people just needed to pay their bills. The implication is that people have the money and the resources and just do not want to pay their bills, that they are lazy or deceitful. Orr speaks from a place of privilege that embraces the myth and the stereotypes.

### His-story, Her-story, and God's Story

The myth created by the discursive repetition of the stereotype is constructed by those who have the power to tell the story. Even when direct speech is attributed to the Samaritan woman, it is not necessarily herstory. We can at least allow the story to be disrupted by or placed in dialogue with other stories about women where the author may have had another agenda and therefore let some alternative reality escape through the cracks in the androcentric, colonial text. According to our text, the Samaritan woman is divorced and single, but in some kind of domestic relationship with a man, not necessarily sexual, who is not her husband.

Other androcentric, patriarchal texts allow that she could have been caught in the cycle of a levirate marriage, which required a deceased man's brother(s) to marry his widow and to produce legitimate heirs, as was the case with Ruth, the Moabite daughter-in-law of Naomi (Ruth 1:1–22; Deut 25:5–10). Likewise, her previous husbands could simply have divorced her. Possibly, her five husbands prematurely and mysteriously died, as was

the case with Sarah, Raguel's daughter, who had been married to seven husbands, leaving her with the stigma of being cursed (Tob 3:7–9). Similarly, Mark 12:18–23 reveals another possible social reality. Some Sadducees relate to Jesus the story of a woman who married seven husbands who were brothers, and each died, leaving the woman a childless widow.

In any case, as a single woman, presumably without children since the narrative mentions none, the Samaritan woman, who is not described as a noblewoman but was likely a woman of little means, would have needed someone to provide her with shelter and other necessities of life. The community was supposed to take care of widows and orphans; thus, she may well have been living with a distant male relative or some other male who loved her but was fearful of marrying her, lest he too die. She could have been doing the best she could in a patriarchal society where a poor woman without a husband must have some kind of male protection.

If and when the Detroiters whose water was shut off tell their stories, such narratives would be different from the neocolonial metanarratives discursively constructed with stereotypes. Many of the stories will resemble AtPeace Makita's story. A divorced single mother, AtPeace Makita was one of thousands of Detroit residents whose water was shut off. AtPeace owed only \$150 when the department shut off her water, but it was \$150 she did not have (Trainor 2014). She is an educated, hardworking woman who was not making enough money to meet all of her children's needs and pay the water bill, too. AtPeace became an activist when the department cut off water to her household and to thousands of her neighbors.

She is an intelligent, talented, vocal young woman who volunteers as creative director for a nonprofit organization called the Detroit Water Brigade, which solicits donations and which acts as a resource for information and for bringing together residents who need water with persons and organizations who can help supply water, among other things. She is an honorable veteran of the US military and a mother of five living children. When asked how having her water shut off impacted her and her family or people in general, AtPeace stated that, after a matter of days, the state could come in and take away anyone's children and any elderly persons in the home; a person could be evicted immediately and their home declared unfit. AtPeace's story continues as follows:

I was married and had a family and really felt like my foundation was set ... when life happened my husband and I separated unexpectedly. Here I am single with five children.... Life got real. I had to choose between

shoes and the water bill ... caring for my children and the water bill. The hardest thing was I had to face my children and say “we have no water.” It is humiliating. You feel guilty and it’s because of the pressure that’s put on you in society that if you don’t pay your bills you are a delinquent or you are nobody. No consideration of life itself and how life happens to everyone. (Trainor 2014)

Another woman who has one daughter stated that her water was cut off for a bill of \$135. Some people, out of their privilege, cannot imagine how someone could be unable to pay a \$135 bill. I can; I can remember not having enough money to catch a bus. I can remember when my mother did not have sufficient change to catch a bus to get to work so that she could feed her three children, despite the stories she shared with us about the couple of times that she stood at a bus stop with nothing and the wind blew a bus ticket into her hand or a dollar landed at her frozen feet. Forty percent of Detroiters may have lost access to water by the end of the summer of 2014. Yet, major sports facilities in Detroit owed thousands without having their water service interrupted: Palmer Park Golf Club owed \$200,000; Joe Louis Red Wings Arena, \$80,000; and Ford Field owed \$55,000. As the *Michigan Citizen* reported, we are witnessing a neo-apartheid (Trainor 2014).

Many poor people juggle bills from one month to the next, triaging or prioritizing—choosing between food, gas or a bus ticket to get to work, necessary clothing, and the rising cost of utilities. According to many residents and businesses, the water bills have been rising over the years in an attempt, some believe, to push poor African American residents out of the city of Detroit to make room for other more acceptable residents who can afford the higher water prices and to allow for the privatization of water.

In her own words, the Samaritan woman testified, Jesus “told me everything I have ever done” (4:39). Readers who continue to read this statement as referring only to the revelation that she had five husbands and that the one she was with now was not her husband are making her marital and/or sexual history everything relevant to her story. However, what Jesus did was to take time to know her story and to acknowledge it, without condemnation or judgment. Of course, too many women have internalized a patriarchal, sexist understanding of their lives, which considers a woman’s sexuality and sexual history and behavior as the sum of a woman’s life and morality or immorality. Maybe Jesus had initially done this too. I think more likely that, in the context of hospitality within a

patriarchal world, it was expected that Jesus would ask the woman to go and get her husband or her father. We are not privy to “everything” Jesus told her, just as the author did not have sufficient space to write all that Jesus said and did (John 21:25). If Jesus, as God’s prophet, does not condemn her, then God does not condemn her.

Through their dialogue, one can conclude that they worship the same God, that the worship of God transcends human habitations. Consistent with the chapter’s opening statement that Jesus has not baptized anyone, he does not subject the woman to baptism (4:2). Jesus does not even attempt to convert the Samaritan woman to his religious understanding of Jerusalem as the city of Zion and the temple of Jerusalem as the place to worship. Instead, he seems to recognize that religion is human-made and that what God requires is that God’s people worship God in spirit and in truth, which transcends tradition, buildings, and dogmas. The most significant revelation in this text, given their shared context, is the free offer from God of living water, access to which no person can live without and without which no person can experience life abundantly (10:10).

### Conclusion

I read the story of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well through a womanist lens that privileges Black women’s experiences, stories, and truths. In so doing, I read the story in its ancient historical context but also privilege the context of my students and our neighbors in Detroit, whose human rights are being violated by denying them access to water, despite the fact that most cannot afford to pay for access to water. Thus, I analyze the story of the Samaritan woman using the critical categories of race, class, gender, and imperialism/(neo)colonialism. I argue that the revelation that Jesus possesses, whereby he has the power to give free living water to the Samaritan woman, is a subversive and anticolonial act that transcends barriers of difference based on race, class, and gender—unjust barriers that human beings erect to deny other humans the right to live life abundantly.

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# Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: Taking Risks, Reversing Expectations, and Crossing Boundaries at the Well

Demetrius K. Williams

I sit Sister-girl from Samaria in front of us today because I believe that this sister has a message for us ...

So begins the sermon “Sister-Girl from Samaria,” by the late Rev. Dr. Brenda J. Little (2002), former senior pastor of Bethany Baptist Church of Christ in Evanston, Illinois.<sup>1</sup> Her sermon, delivered at a women’s retreat, reveals her homiletical, theological, and exegetical training in the seminary/academy, yet it is also faithful to the black preaching tradition in both its poetic storytelling style and powerful folksy delivery. More subtly, however, it evinces an understated, often overlooked, and unarticulated aspect of the African American traditional engagement with the Bible: a rehumanizing reading of the Scriptures. To be sure, humanizing the sacred Scriptures has been one of the most significant contributions of the African American reading and interpretive traditions of the Bible. To be more precise, I suggest that

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1. When giving the title of her sermon in the opening lines of her sermon text, Little (2002, 88) adds a subtitle: “A New Focus on Jesus.” Brenda Little passed on 12 December 2012 after a long battle with cancer. Her ministry spanned four decades, and she made her mark in ministry in several ways: as a national and international preacher and teacher, as the first African American woman to be ordained at Second Baptist Church, as the first woman called to pastor Bethany Baptist Church of Christ, as the first woman to graduate with a master of divinity degree from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, and as the first woman to serve in the chaplaincy in the Department of Veterans Affairs. See “Obituary: Dr. Brenda Little” 2013.

a contextual, “humanized” reading of the Bible—a perspective that did not seek to mask or hide the issues and concerns of the interpreter—was a vital necessity in the African American experience with the Bible. In this world, they were already “dehumanized”—through the slave system causing “social death,” through the ideology of white supremacy (wherein they were initially considered three-fifths of a human being), and through the U.S. empire-building enterprise in which they were used as chattel. Yet, African Americans found opportunities for “rehumanization” within the same Bible that was used also to support the ideology of their oppressors. What I mean is that they found within the Bible opportunities to intervene and to challenge the ideologies supporting their oppression and also to navigate and articulate strategies for freedom, humanity, survival, and liberation. In short, using the Bible to address their “real life” contextual issues related to gender, racial, ethnic, political, social or national concerns “re-humanized” them and demonstrated also the power of the Bible to address real human concerns, general and particular. (Williams 2012, 155)

Examining Jesus’s encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well in John 4:1–42 from this interpretive perspective is especially instructive to and supportive of a rehumanizing and nuanced liberative reading. On the one hand, the encounter “is transgressive of many walls and barriers that have been erected by historical circumstance, custom and tradition” (Lee-Pollard 1992, 23). On the other, it represents the risks and courage required to overcome and contravene the manifold boundaries and barriers of race, religion, ethnicity, sex, history, prejudice, and class that dehumanize individuals and whole peoples. Such barriers interestingly and inevitably become an essential psychological and sociological construct in support of an overarching normative ideology. In this essay, I glean such elements from the text and assess them from an African American interpretive context of proclamation or preaching.

Importantly, however, I recognize that in examining this narrative it is not hermeneutically sound to translate any passage literarily or analogically into one’s own context without first considering the text’s own historical-political context and setting. In addition, attention should be given to exploring how sociohistorical and socioreligious circumstances and developments influenced the shape of the narrative (Zhang 2007). Taking these items into consideration, it is possible to recover the general cultural expectations concerning a number of important factors (at least for a contemporary interpreter/reader of this ancient text). For example, with

respect to the Samaritan woman's sociocultural and historical context, one might seek to discover what gender expectations and relations were in antiquity. In light of prevailing gender customs, does the context agree or disagree with prevailing views? Does the context reimpose those gender rules or intimate a transformation of them? (Neyrey 1994, 77). Likewise, what were the views of race/ethnicity in the culture of the text, and what is the narrator's intention of sharing those views? These and other kinds of questions must be examined before exploring the potential meaning for the contemporary reader.

### Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: A Liberative Reading of the Narrative Context

In the essay I examine this passage to emphasize the liberative elements that highlight the transgressive aspects of the dialogical encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. In addition, this examination avoids falling into the negative interpretive perspectives that have demeaned and demoralized the woman of Samaria without any narrative indications to support such a reading.

Two major dialogues of Jesus dominate the structure of John 4:1–42. I modify the outline of George Beasley-Murray (1987, 56–59) and Rudolf Schnackenburg (1982, 1:421–58) for my work here. Once the introduction (John 4:1–6) provides reasons for Jesus's departure from Judea and journey through Samaria, the first major dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (who arrives after the disciples depart) occurs in verses 7–26. These verses contain two distinct themes: water (vv. 7–18) and worship (vv. 19–26). The next major (but shorter) dialogue is between Jesus and his disciples (vv. 31–38). This dialogue is set between two paragraphs: the first (vv. 27–30) describes the return and wonderment of the disciples (and the departure of the woman); the second (vv. 39–42) describes the witness of the Samaritan woman to the people of Sychar (with Jesus's own two-day witness thereafter) and their resulting confession of Jesus as the savior of the world. This general outline invites a more comprehensive examination of the context.

#### Introduction (John 4:1–6)

The first observation that might invite one's attention is that the introduction to this episode provides a rationale for Jesus's departure from Jerusalem and an explanation for why Jesus traveled through Samaria

(vv. 1–3). Jesus apparently departs from Judea on account of the mounting tension between his followers and the Pharisees, who notice that Jesus is baptizing more disciples than John the Baptizer. This means that he is becoming, and indeed has the potential to pose, a greater threat than John. This is the narrator’s rationale for Jesus’s and his disciples’ departure from Judea as well as for their crossing the boundary into Samaria, an area that was considered by most Jews as out of bounds.

Most Jewish travelers would bypass or take an alternate route to avoid Samaria entirely on their way from Judea to Galilee. According to Josephus (*A.J.* 20.118; Feldman 1965, 62–73) it was unsafe for a Galilean to pass through Samaritan land, because the Samaritans were seen as half-breeds and apostates (*A.J.* 10.184, 17.20, 18.85; Pakis 2005, 516; see also Gaster 1923, 36–37, Jeremias 1969, 352–586). So it is not immediately apparent why Jesus “had to [ἐδεῖ] go through Samaria”—it is not a brute fact of geography (Callahan 2007, 191). Jews were quite accustomed to taking alternative routes. The only way this necessity can be understood, then, is as a “divine necessity” (Davidson 2005, 162): it was a part of Jesus’s mission and plan. In short, it becomes apparent that Jesus intentionally crossed the border into the forbidden zone of Samaria for purposes that become clearer as the narrative unfolds.

### Jesus’s Conversation with the Samaritan Woman: From Dialogue to Deliverance (John 4:7–26)

#### The Theme of Water (4:7–18)

In the following narrative recounting the first development of Jesus’s dialogue with the Samaritan woman, the disciples depart, leaving Jesus alone at the well, to which the Samaritan woman soon thereafter comes. There is one thing here we must be clear about: while the Samaritan woman comes to the well as a custom, it was not so for Jesus (or any other Jews) to come to Samaria. Jesus, thus, ventured *intentionally* into the Samaritan woman’s territory. It was “about noon” (v. 6) when Jesus’s disciples left him alone at the well, because he was fatigued, and when the Samaritan came to the well. This seemingly simple time reference is hermeneutically important, because this small detail has interestingly given rise to a number of moral assessments of the Samaritan woman’s character.

This temporal marker has been interpreted quite often to mean that the Samaritan woman is trying to avoid the embarrassment of meeting

anyone, so she is obviously a woman of ill repute. Otherwise, she would have avoided the hot sun and come earlier with her female friends to fetch water. Some also argue that the nameless woman of Samaria has to be careful not to be seen, because she fails to comply with her society's expectations: she is not from a normal family, as she has had more than five husbands (v. 18). For many readers, "she is [simply] a 'bad woman' in her society" (Barton 2016, 7). Even more speculatively, others suggest that she is such a moral outcast that the women even drove her away from the village well, making it necessary for her to come to this particular well at this particular time to draw water (Davidson 2005, 164).

Perhaps more accurate is the supposition that "the Samaritan woman is economically poor.... [Otherwise] she would have sent somebody else to fetch water" (Barton 2016, 8). Nevertheless, it appears that she is defying cultural expectations by being at the well at an unconventional hour and, more importantly, alone (Pakis 2005, 524). However, many interpreters have failed to realize that well usage was restricted to the evening hours only for rural shepherds and, additionally, that no one at that time had running water in their homes, so that well usage might have been necessary at any given time. Furthermore, the comment regarding the time of day in the narrative is immediately connected with Jesus's journey and his weariness, not the woman's presence at the well (Davidson 2005, 164).<sup>2</sup>

One thing is clear in the narrative at this point—Jesus is the initiator of the conversation with the Samaritan woman, and fatigue from his journey (v. 6) provides the rationale for his request for water. He has been sitting alone at the well, thirsty with no one to give him water, since the disciples have gone into the town to buy food (vv. 31–33). Thus, the only possible source of liquid refreshment is the Samaritan woman who now stands before him at the well. So Jesus asks her for a drink (v. 7), although it was a serious breach of etiquette for a man to speak to a strange woman. Jesus's request is especially questionable, for Jews would have normally refused to speak to Samaritans (O'Rahilly 1938a, 787). In response to this

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2. The woman's arrival at the well "at noon" may symbolically contrast that with that of Nicodemus, who comes to Jesus "at night" (3:2). Johannine symbolism is an important cue in deciphering the narrative at this point, because *light* and *darkness* are symbols for ethical behavior (see John 3:19–21). That Nicodemus appears upright as a leader of the Judeans but comes to Jesus "at night," while the Samaritan woman appears morally suspect but encounters Jesus "at noon," adds a touch of irony to the moral symbolisms.

inappropriate request, the woman replies in amazement: “‘How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?’ (Jews do share things in common with Samaritans)” (v. 9).

The woman apparently knows that Jesus is a Jew from his dress and/or speech. Even more, she recognizes the religious laws and customs that sanction their separateness—their *segregation* and *apartheid*. “The woman’s question,” writes Gail O’Day (1986, 665, emphasis added), “establishes a clear division between herself and Jesus, a division reflected in the well-balanced language—*you* being a Jew from *me* being a Samaritan woman.” The Greek verb for “share” in verse 9 (συγγράμαι) means literally “to use together”—in this case, her “water jar” (v. 28), thus indicating clearly that Jews do not use vessels together with Samaritans, and most definitely not with Samaritan women (Daube 1950, 144). While David Daube has successfully challenged the interpretation of συγγράμαι as meaning “to have dealings with” (v. 9, RSV), it would seem that the meanings could go hand in hand, since people do not “share things in common” with those with whom they do not “have dealings” (Pakis 2005, 516).

What is reflected in the woman’s response, moreover, is her recognition of an attitude that was ultimately codified in rabbinic law: “The daughters of the Samaritans are regarded as menstruants from their cradle” (Daube 1950, 137, referencing m. Nid. 4:1), and “the spit of a menstruant was believed to be especially contaminating” (Pakis 2005, 516, referencing m. Nid. 32b). From the perspective of purity laws, then, every Samaritan woman was considered unclean. Therefore, it follows that any vessel used by a Samaritan woman must also be unclean. This may be the basis of the thorny issue to which the woman is responding in Jesus’s request for a drink. She recognizes the complicated history between Jews and Samaritans and the rationale as to why Jews do not use (vessels) in common with Samaritans.

In asking the woman for a drink, Jesus shows compassionate disregard for the hostile presumptions regarding the Samaritan woman, ultimately “for the sake of a more inclusive fellowship” (Daube 1950, 137–38). He is not afraid of religious presumptions of defilement. Custom and law might prevent her from coming to him, so he comes to her within her own area, even willing to use the same water jar (Barton 2016, 8). He also risks the danger of engaging in what traditional standards might deem as a “scandalous conversation” (O’Day 1998, 383; also Keener 2003, 596).

All told, the Samaritan woman apparently expects Jesus to be aware of at least two salient aspects of her identity: she is a woman (her sex) and a Samaritan (her ethnicity). This is what puzzles her initially about



Jesus's request for water. Yet, Jesus ignores the apartheid and the segregation between them. Jesus is aware that he, as a Jewish man, "is asking for water from one who ... is an outcast" (Barton 2016, 8). However, the woman is unaware that the one who is requesting a drink from her also has something to offer her.

"Are You Greater Than Our Ancestor Jacob?"

Jesus counters the woman's pointed question (v. 9) with an enticing offer: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water" (v. 10). The woman replies rightfully: "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" (v. 11). This is a subtle twist in the conversation. Jesus asked her for a drink, but it is really the woman who is in need of refreshment. She is not quite aware of Jesus's identity yet, but slowly, as the narrative unfolds, she comes to recognize who the one with whom she speaks really is. Still, for now his identity is elusive, so she retorts: "Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob ... ?" (v. 12).

To be sure, irony is at work in this exchange, and John's use of irony is masterfully employed in this narrative of John 4. The number of verses dedicated to this particular narrative alerts the reader to its importance. According to Jo Ann Davidson (2005, 161–62), "One of the most ironic questions in the entire Gospel comes when the Samaritan woman asks Jesus: 'Are you greater than our father Jacob?'" in verse 12. Koester (1990, 675) notes that Josephus accused the Samaritans of claiming descent from Joseph only when their Jewish neighbors were prospering, but declaring that they were of foreign descent when the Jews were in trouble. When the woman replies in verse 15, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water," she is still operating on the natural/earthly plane and not yet realizing that living water is not dependent on a well or a spring; it is a spiritual experience (Davidson 2005, 161–62). Unlike Nicodemus, who only understands earthly things in the preceding narrative (John 3:12), however, she gradually comes to a greater realization of the identity of the one with whom she speaks.

"Go, Call Your Husband": Interesting Encounters at a Well

While it might have been a serious breach of etiquette for a man to speak to a strange (or unknown) woman in the ancient Middle East, a thirsty

traveler might well ask any woman for a drink if she happened to be at a well in the time of need. For example, this is what Abraham's servant does when talking to Rebecca at the well in Mesopotamia (Gen 24:17; O'Rahilly 1938a, 787). The story of men and women meeting at a well has a number of parallels in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: Gen 24:10–61; 29:1–20; Exod 2:15–21 (Fewell and Phillips 1997; Duke 1985; Neyrey 1979; Carmichael 1979–1980).<sup>3</sup> Interpreters have noticed a consistent literary pattern and form to these kinds of episodes: (1) a man travels into a foreign land, (2) he goes to a well, (3) he meets there a maiden, (4) water is given, (5) the woman hurriedly runs home to tell, (6) the man is invited to stay, and (7) a betrothal is concluded (Dockery 1988, 133; Duke 1985, 101). Given this intertextual cue, an informed reader of this text would immediately have assumed that, when Jesus enters into Samaria, a foreign country, and meets a woman at a well, overtones of courtship would ensue.

Such a reader might also note that there is a story about a wedding and some water in John 2. Also, John the Baptizer calls Jesus the bridegroom in John 3:29 (Dockery 1988, 133). Nevertheless, this narrative reverses and confounds expectations for, in the end, "it is not the woman's father but the townspeople who greet Jesus, and the episode concludes with a civic reception rather than a betrothal" (Koester 1990, 668 n. 9).

Readers certainly do not get what they were expecting from this type-scene. There is an additional turn in the conversation that startles not only readers of the narrative but also the woman in the narrative. Jesus says to the Samaritan woman, "Go, call your husband" (v. 16). She replies immediately and honestly that she has none (at least not at the present time). She is unmarried, but not because she is a virgin; on the contrary, she has been divorced and/or also widowed five times, and the current man with whom she is involved is not her husband either. This development of the narrative requires special attention.

This development differs ironically from the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament parallels. In John's Gospel, the potential bride is less than

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3. There are also some interesting parallels outside the Old Testament. Pauwels (2010, 1) examines the manifold and interesting ways in which Indian popular movies have appropriated folk and mythological materials focusing on the *panaghata-Illa* or the theme of "the woman waylaid at the well." This theme is an important one because it raises the issue of so-called eve-teasing, a form of sexual harassment of women omnipresent in public spaces in South Asia.

a virtuous young maiden. Some readers suggest in response that Jesus “identifies himself in this action, not with innocence, but with a guilty, wounded, downhearted and estranged person, typical of fallen humanity” (Dockery 1988, 134–35). Others interpret this episode within the overall narrative in more toxic androcentric and even misogynist ways, calling her “a sinful Samaritan woman” (Keener 2003, 504), “a sinner, an adulteress, a shameless person” (Neyrey 2007, 95), or a “hussy” and a “prostitute” (see the critique of this view in Lee-Pollard 1992, 25). Some have even argued that the woman is making sexual advances to Jesus, who remains unmoved and untainted by the woman’s carnal seduction (Zhang 2007).

Although many commentators view the Samaritan woman’s marital status as a primary indication of her low status, unworthiness, and moral inadequacy, the text never states why the marriages were dissolved. While it would not be uncommon for some of the marriages to have ended with the death of a husband, some interpreters have even questioned this possibility: “We can hardly hold that she was five times widowed; she must have been divorced, *and presumably not without reason*. Clearly her evil life was notorious. But she was honest enough not to pass her paramour off as her husband, not even to a stranger. However, she shrank from the confession [‘I have no husband’] which Christ now undertook for her” (O’Rahilly 1938b, 825, emphasis added).

Even if divorced, she is still blamed, culpable, faulted; something has to be wrong with her, although it is generally acknowledged that divorce in this era was the sole prerogative of the male (Deut 24:1–4). There is no indication of divorce being initiated by a wife (Davidson 2005, 166). Rabbinic laws did allow a maximum of three marriages, and at this time in Jewish society the possibility of five husbands could have been permitted by levirate marriage (Deut 25:5–10). Even allowing these considerations, however, many critics still conclude that the Samaritan woman led a loose moral life. Apparently, it is enough that she is a woman and a Samaritan (Okure 2009, 407).

Fortunately, several scholars today have questioned and reexamined this unjustified characterization of the Samaritan woman and asked whether this characterization does not result from interpreters’ own prejudices, especially since the narrator does not intimate any of the moralistic characterizations mentioned above. Jesus’s unnamed interlocutor is merely referred to as a “woman” and a “Samaritan.” Whatever the reasons for her five marriages, Jesus does not criticize the woman’s past marriages or past

lifestyle; he focuses instead on addressing her present living arrangements with a man outside marriage. Moreover, in light of the highly gendered moral standards of the time, it was unlikely that such a woman could have persuaded a man to live with her on her own initiative. To be sure, Jesus even commends her twice for her honesty in describing her present marital status (John 4:17–18; Davidson 2005, 165–66). Having said that, within the narrative world of the Gospel of John, the woman is likely to have been considered suspect (an outcast?) in own her society because of her martial history (Okure 2009, 408).

According to other interpreters, this question of five husbands is a subtle reference to (1) the various deities worshiped in Samaria, or (2) the nations that colonized Samaria after its fall. In other words, the Samaritan woman's history is an analogy for the Samaritan nation, which originated when five foreign nations with their pagan deities were settled in the region of Samaria after the fall of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kgs 17:24, 29–31). With respect to the pagan deities, the biblical account lists seven gods, but Josephus (*A.J.* 9.14.3) implies that there were only five deities in his account. The woman's sixth man is then compared to the syncretistic form of Yahwism practiced alongside the pagan cults at Samaria (2 Kgs 17:28, 32–34). What seems to add some grist to this interpretation is that the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament compares religious apostasy in many cases to sexual unfaithfulness (e.g., Ezek 23; Hos 1–3). If John 4:16–18 is read as an analogy for corrupt Samaritan worship, it provides a natural transition to both the subject of worship in verse 20 and Jesus's statement in verse 22 that the Samaritans worship what they do not know (Koester 1990, 669).

Looking at this issue from the perspective of Samaria's political history, the reference to the woman's five former husbands might analogically recall Samaria's colonial past, with five foreign nations settling in Samaria after the fall of the Northern Kingdom. If so, then Jesus's reference to "the one whom you have now" (v. 18) might refer to the current colonial power, most likely Rome. Craig Koester (1990, 676) writes,

Similarly, the pattern of colonization and the introduction of foreign deities, which had begun with the Assyrians, was continued by Herod the Great, who transformed the capital of Samaria into a Greco-Roman city named Sebaste, the Greek name for Augustus. Foreign colonists were settled in Sebaste—six thousand of them according to Josephus (*Jewish War* 1.21.1 chap. 403)—and the imperial cult was introduced.

In fact, Jesus's statement in verse 16 can also be read as a double entendre wherein the command "Go, call your husband" can also mean in Aramaic, which most likely underlies the Greek, "Go invoke your Lord [*ba'alim*]" (Callahan 2007, 192). In the same manner, the Samaritan woman's statement "I have no husband" can also be interpreted to mean "I have no god," or, even better, that she has no people, since from a Jewish perspective the Samaritans were "no nation" (Sir 50:25–26; Koester 1990, 676–77).

Although interpretations of John 4:16–18 in terms of Samaria's history may be viewed as a speculative quest for allegorical significance (Blomberg 1995, 13), they do help to mitigate the biased moralizing that has dominated the characterizations of the Samaritan woman, and reveal instead the larger and more acute effects of colonial rule and powers on indigenous subject peoples. Perhaps this is why one might notice the unique dignity and delicacy with which Jesus interacts and treats the woman in the entire episode.

Jesus's gentleness, to be sure, should govern the reading of these verses as well. Many have easily read a rebuke here where none is necessarily present. Calling her husband is simply the first stage in her liberation and role as witness; soon she will call all her townsfolk to Jesus (Blomberg 1995, 10). Seemingly Jesus's intent is not to reveal her moral inadequacies but, on the contrary, to address her profound thirst for a real life (Lee-Pollard 1992, 23). In the end, Jesus does not criticize her or make any moral judgment against her but commends her for telling the truth. His non-judgmental handling of her complicated personal—and social-political—situation gives her the freedom to open her life to him and also allows her to lay before him other questions of faith.

### The Theme of Worship (4:19–26)

Questions of faith and theological concerns emerge in this next section. First, the Samaritan woman has a stark realization that opens her understanding and moves her enlightenment forward as to the significance of the one with whom she is speaking: "Sir, I see that you are a prophet" (4:19). The woman recognizes Jesus as a prophet on account of their foregoing verbal exchange about her personal life or Samaria's history. Even more, she sees him as one who can address a pressing theological concern. The woman, along with the rest of the Samaritans, believes, according to Alfred O'Rahilly (1938b, 830), in the advent of the Taheb ("Restorer"): "The *Taheb* was apparently a purely human ruler who would rebuild the

temple on Garizim, proclaim the true Law, and then die and be buried on the sacred mount.... For her the Messiah was the highest religious leader that was to appear on earth.” In addition to this Samaritan idea of the prophet, Israelite traditions (e.g., Deut 18:15, 18; 2 Kgs 22:14 // 2 Chr 34:22; 1 Macc 4:46; 14:41) stated that a true prophet would be able to settle rival religious claims and should be able to settle the burning issue between Jews and Samaritans (Miller 1973, 1291; Hendricks 2001, 154).

Sensing Jesus’s religious importance, the woman feels more open to engage his prophetic prowess in addressing a vexed issue in Jewish-Samaritan relations: the proper worship place for worship. Her question—“Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you [plural; ‘you Jews’] say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem” (v. 20)—evinces her understanding of both Samaritan and Jewish theology, and it also reveals that she is not unknowledgeable in contemporary political-religious matters. In fact, the narrative read closely indicates that she is an intelligent woman who has understood the theological and political realities of her day and culture.

This particular question of theological and practical importance carries with it further evidence for the separation and divide between Jew and Samaritan: the we/you conflict. The conflict and division between the Jews and Samaritans can be outlined in the following manner (Løland 2009, 111; but see Neyrey 2007, 95):

Jesus	Samaritan woman
we	you
the Jews	the Samaritans
Jerusalem	this mountain
we know	you do not know
both worship (the Father)	
both have potential for the new group of worshipers in spirit and truth	

This brief outline makes visually clear the stark religious separation of Jews and Samaritans. The first four lines indicate their complete separation: we/

you, Jews/Samaritans, Jerusalem/this mountain (Mount Gerizim), and we know/you do not know. This total separation between the two groups fuels their controversy over their respective holy sites, which was quite intense (Keener 2003, 612). It comes as no surprise, however, that Jesus includes himself directly in this we/you dichotomy, because the “we” with whom Jesus identifies in this context can only mean “the Jews.” Even more, Jesus adds: “for salvation is from the Jews” (v. 22).

This is the only time we hear of *σωτηρία* (salvation) in John but, as the narrative ends in verse 42, the Samaritans say about Jesus: “We know he is the savior of the world [*ὁ σωτὴρ τοῦ κόσμου*]” (Løland 2009, 112). According to Koester, when Jesus says, “You people worship what you do not know” (v. 22), he is apparently acknowledging the idolatrous tendencies of the Samaritans. However, when Jesus immediately adds that “the hour is coming, and now is, when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you people worship the Father” (4:23), he is not only anticipating the imminent arrival of true worship in Samaria but also seeking to bring an end to the notion that Jerusalem and its temple will remain the single location of worship for the new community that will emerge from his ministry (Koester 1990, 674). As the last lines of the outline indicate, true worship is what brings the two groups together as one and demolishes the divisions between the two peoples.

This dialogue reveals the stark reality that the Samaritan woman most likely functions as a representative of the other, a race despised by the Jews as outcasts, although they could have been and sometimes were considered just another Jewish sect by outsiders or non-Jews. According to Alan Crown (1991, 17):

In many respects the Samaritans of the first century were a Jewish sect, but we can trace a gradually changing relationship between Judaeans and Samaritans. It was only in the generation after Judah ha-Nasi, following the Bar Kokhba revolt, that we see the development of anti-Samaritanism in a series of negative statements by the rabbinical teachers, culminating in the ruling that the Samaritans are unquestionably to be considered as Gentiles. Likewise there is evidence from the church fathers that in the first and second centuries the Samaritans were regarded as Jews.

Further, Robert Bull (1975, 59) points out:

And when the woman referred to the termination of Samaritan worship in the past, the poignancy of her remark would have been apparent

to Jesus because very near them both lay the ruins of Shechem, capital of her people, destroyed by the “Jerusalem” Jew, John Hyrcanus some 150 years before. Above them could be seen the ruins of the destroyed Samaritan temple complex and the great altar of daily sacrifice, which had been out of use since its destruction.

This narrative, then, highlights the history of intense animosity between Jews and Samaritans that dated back to circa 722 BCE, when Sargon II, king of Assyria, settled five nations in Samaria after the deportation of leading Israelite citizens (2 Kgs 17). As a result, Samaria’s inhabitants were regarded as a race of semipagans (2 Kgs 17:24–41; cf. Sir 50:25–26). Thus, after this time the greater part of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament treats the Samaritans with enmity (Schurer 1979).

To be sure, there was a mutual hatred between Jews and Samaritans, and things intensified in the postexilic period because Zerubbabel refused to allow the Samaritans to help rebuild the temple (Ezra 4). Thus, about 300 BCE the Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim as a rival to the temple in Jerusalem (Okure 2009, 407). The Jewish views of the Samaritans did not improve by the time of the New Testament, as evidenced in Matt 10:5, where the disciples are told, “Enter no town of the Samaritans,” not to mention Flavius Josephus’s (A.J. 18.29–30) report of a desecration of the temple in Jerusalem by Samaritans. “Even the Jewish leaders in John’s Gospel,” Okure (2009, 407) argues, “perceive Samaritans as demon-possessed, and Jesus as one of them (8:48). Racial prejudice and hatred could not go any further.” Because of intermarriage with gentiles and the appropriation of some of the religions of their Assyrian colonial masters, Samaritans became “despised heretics” and “half-breeds.” As a result, Jewish descendants distanced themselves from Samaritans on the grounds of religious impurity (Dube 1996, 46).

Jesus’s engagement with the Samaritan woman, however, is the beginning of reversing this toxic history, ethnoracial tension, and rival religious praxis between Jews and Samaritans. When Jesus pronounces the inclusiveness of all those “who worship in spirit and truth,” he “pronounces the doom of all racial and national religion, all worship incompatible with God’s universal [parent]hood. The Temple in Jerusalem will be laid low like that of Gerizim. Christ decides neither for nor against either place; the claims of both will ere long be lost in something higher” (O’Rahilly 1938b, 827–28). At the close of this discussion on holy places and wor-



ship, Jesus reveals to the woman that he is the Christ (Messiah)—the one who can resolve the tensions and disputes between Jews and Samaritans. Outside John 8:58, this is the most direct assertion by Jesus of his own identity (Blomberg 1995, 9). The narrative indicates overall that Jesus uses this development of his dialogue with the woman to bring her into deeper theological truths, which eventually leads her to accept his revealed identity as the Messiah (Davidson 2005, 166).

### The Disciples' Return and Wonderment (4:27–30)

When the disciples return from the village and find Jesus concluding his dialogue with the Samaritan woman just before she departs into the city to invite the people of her town to meet Jesus, they are amazed and astonished at the behavior of their teacher (John 4:27–38). Yet, they do not ask him any questions about her or why he was talking with her. The narrative, however, mentions specifically that the woman “left her water jar” (v. 35). The implication of this subtle narrative note is that she left it for Jesus, “wearied with his journey,” to drink from, and, according to Daube (1950, 138), in “an act comparable to, and indeed more serious than, dealings involving contact with an Am-Haaretz [‘people of the land’ or gentiles],” Jesus did so.

Nevertheless, like many Jews of the day, Jesus’s disciples do not see any potential in the woman. The disciples do not even see Samaria as a potential field of mission. They ask Jesus about food and eating, and totally miss the mark of Jesus’s mission and purpose (like Nicodemus, their minds are on earthly things!). The woman, on the other hand, senses the urgency of Jesus’s mission. Using the language and symbolism of agriculture, Jesus then compares the Samaritans to a mission field ripe for harvesting: “Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest.’ But, I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting” (4:35). What the disciples need to observe with mission-mindedness are the approaching villagers who respond positively to the Samaritan woman’s invitation (“Come see a man who told me everything I have ever done,” v. 36).

### Results of the Samaritan Woman’s Witness (4:39–42)

While many interpreters describe the Samaritan woman as an outcast and a despised individual, the textual evidence does not support the

idea that this woman is a person of no influence. With her acceptance of Jesus's claim to be the promised Messiah, she forgets the reason she initially came to the well, leaves her water jar, and hurries to the town, going to where she knows the people gather to rest from the noonday heat. Then, at her invitation, they come to see for themselves what this woman is testifying about. Without doubt, one who is a local prostitute does not give this testimony. "For it is hardly a possibility, if she was truly a low-class prostitute, that the men of Samaria would openly follow her to meet a person whom she described as being able to reveal everything a person ever did" (Davidson 2005, 166–67). Most notably, perhaps, from the language of the text, the woman herself becomes an apostle. The close parallels between her role in testifying about Jesus to the Samaritans and the actions of John the Baptist, Andrew, and Philip in John 1, each of whom also pointed people to Christ by saying "Come and see," demonstrate a functional equivalence between these male witnesses and this female witness. Feminist interpreters have rightly stressed the role of the Samaritan woman as a missionary to her own people (Blomberg 1995, 10; see especially in this regard Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 327–28).

The story of Jesus's encounter with the Samaritans in John 4 reaches a climax when the people of Sychar acclaim him "the Savior of the world" (4:42). This has indicated to several recent interpreters who engage empire studies within biblical criticism to supplement the standard reconstructions of Jewish and Greek backgrounds to the Gospel of John. These recent interpreters argue that John should be read against a backdrop of past (and present) colonization (Cassidy 1992; Koester 1990). Note in this regard that the title "Savior" (σωτήρ) appears nowhere else in John and was not a typical messianic designation in first-century Jewish or Samaritan thought. The term *savior* did enjoy wide currency in the Greco-Roman world, however; the full title "Savior of the world" was used for the Roman emperor. According to Koester (1990, 665), "This title for Jesus, then, in 4:42 stands in striking contrast to the emperors' arrogation of that title to themselves. Sychar (4:5) was near Sebaste; the Roman presence there was well known." Perhaps the Samaritans in John recognize that Jesus as the Messiah can transcend national boundaries, because, like Caesar, he is a figure of universal significance; unlike Caesar, however, Jesus is calling the woman, and the other Samaritans, to reject colonial attachments for true spiritual leadership (Koester 1990, 665, 668).

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: A Liberative *Rehumanizing* Reading in African American Interpretive and Homiletic Perspectives

A postcolonial and empire-studies reading of the Bible resonates well with African American biblical interpretation because both approaches can hermeneutically expose the social, religious, and political forces that create disparities and instability among subject peoples, including ethnic conflict and competition, crises of identity, and other kinds of colonial prerogatives. To be sure, history past and present reveals that such colonial prerogatives have tended to dehumanize colonial subjects. In this regard, African Americans in their particular context have used several strategies for engaging the Bible to address their life situation, restore their human dignity, and challenge racist and oppressive social structures (Williams 2012, 158–59). Of the various interpretive strategies used in the African American interpretation of the Bible, the most appropriate approach, in my view, for examining and exploring a liberative *rehumanizing* reading of the narrative of Jesus and the Samaritan woman is to use African American stories and experiences as a strategy for reading this narrative.

This narrative encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman can be examined most effectively through the African American preaching tradition, because African American preachers and pastors have functioned as theologians who have transmitted theological truths to the masses in African American faith communities. They are the ones who have provided the major theological interpretations for the majority of African Americans through their preaching to and for the people, usually in church settings. Hence, African American preachers have been engaged in both proclamation and interpretation. “This admirable preaching tradition,” declares Olin Moyd (1995, xi), “provided divine corrections and gave eternal directions to a people standing, at critical moments in human history, with their backs against the wall.” Their theological musings and practical solutions to the challenges of black life in America spoke uniquely to the contextual experience of their audience because, in the words of James Cone:

Theology is not universal language about God. Rather, it is human speech informed by historical and theological traditions.... Theology is *contextual* language—that is, defined by the human situation that gives birth to it. No one can write theology for all times, places, and persons.... God is neither indigenous nor contextual; yet God has chosen to be

revealed in different ways in indigenous and contextual settings around the world. God has chosen not to overwhelm the indigenous with the universal. Only God is universal; the only claim my group can make is that resulting from the small disclosure that God has made in our faithful community. (cited in Moyd 1995, 7–8)

Thus, the kind of theology that has been explicit in African American preaching could not afford to be abstract or esoteric: “It has always responded to the questions raised in life circumstances ... that [address African Americans] particular conditions, needs, and aspirations” (Moyd 1995, 11). The ability, on the one hand, to creatively and effectively tell the Bible story in light of African American experiences and, on the other hand, to tell African American experiences in light of the Bible has been the hallmark of African American preaching and interpretive traditions. To be sure, being able to tell the story in general is important in black preaching (42–45).

Yet, the tradition of the black preaching voice has overwhelmingly been a male voice. What does the preaching voice of African American women have to offer? Their preaching has been just as powerful and distinctive as that of black males. What makes their voice and telling of the story unique is the creative use of language, their personal experiences as African American women, and the use of this personal/collective testimony to communicate effectively to their hearers (Hunter 2003, 14).

While the descriptive term *womanist* may not be claimed by all African American women to describe their preaching style, content, or theological/theological position, “womanist preaching” has become a way of defining the homiletic used by many African American women preachers. This theoretical/theological perspective offers practical applications that allow African American women a vital means of recognizing and honing their authentic voice as well as affirming their cultural, religious, rhetorical, and literary traditions. This womanist homiletic is rooted in the rhetorical tradition of African American women, and has “shifted away from the traditional ‘three points and a poem’ sermon form to narratives, story sermons, preaching as celebration sermons, and conversational sermons” (Hunter 2003, 14; cf. Thompson 2018).

Many womanist preachers begin with their own personal experiences or the experiences of others in their community of hearers, including, but not limited to, the experiences of African American children, women, and men. These experiences are then incorporated into their sermons as

testimonies for the purpose of connecting with their congregations, for encouraging the believing community, and for conversion (cited in Hunter 2003, 15). Storytelling or testifying describes when “stories from the Bible or from human experience are told to make the sermon’s message ‘come alive.’... Here testifying is distinguished from story-telling in that testifying is based strictly upon personal experience” (cited in Hunter 2003, 15).

Many African American women preachers have emphasized that the Samaritan woman also has a testimony (“He told me everything I have ever done,” 4:39) and testifies to her people about her encounter with Jesus Christ to bring about their conversion (“*Come and see* a man who told me everything I have ever done,” 4:29). Cain Hope Felder (1998, 144–45) notes, “Few gospel passages are as amenable to themes for black women in ministry as John 4:4–42.... In the Johannine tradition of reporting Jesus’ encounter with a Samaritan woman, there are multiple ingredients for today’s black women in general and the black woman contemplating or actually engaged in ministry within American society.” He suggests, furthermore, that, like African American women’s historical circumstances, the Samaritan woman stands in triple jeopardy, for she is a Samaritan, a woman, and one who not only has been married five times but is also living with a man who is not her husband (4:18). Felder (1998, 144–45) continues:

Each aspect of her condition has its parallel among many Black women in America today. Like the Samaritan, they often find themselves in a state of quiet domestic chaos, with all the societal stigmas attached to such circumstances. Given standards of conventional values, the Samaritan woman, like her Black counterpart today, brings great liabilities to her encounter with Jesus.

While many African American female preachers and interpreters might agree with Felder’s assessment (or only certain aspects of it), and several have offered some of the same analogical parallels in their sermons (and theological works), a number of womanist preachers and interpreters desire to tell the story of the Samaritan woman and Jesus in their own voice and from their own experience. As Little (2002, 89–90; my emphasis) says in “Sister-Girl from Samaria”:

I believe that Sister-girl from Samaria can speak across the pages of time and speak to the sisters here today.... I believe that we sisters need to take

another look at Sister-girl, because we've walked past her for many years. We've glossed over her for many years, and *we've heard her preached and taught about from a male perspective for many years.*

In my examination of this narrative from an African American interpretive and homiletic perspective—and as an African American male scholar/interpreter and pastor/preacher—I attempt to be sensitive and attentive to the womanist voice and tone.

To be sure, the goal of both male and female preachers and interpreters in the African American interpretive tradition has been to communicate a liberative homiletic. Contemporary readers need to be attuned to the impact of empire, colonialism, and ideology on and within biblical texts as well as on and within our own historical and contemporary collective experience. This recognition helps the interpreter to understand that the strained relationship between the Jews and Samaritans illustrates the extent to which imperial domination (Jews over the Samaritans, and also that of other foreign powers—Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and now Roman—over both Jews and Samaritans<sup>4</sup>) has affected and effected the relationship between Jews and Samaritans. Imperial domination has done the same to the relationship of different people at different centuries in the world. One cannot read this narrative, or many other biblical narratives for that matter, without recognizing that imperial domination is a central component to the story/stories. This must especially be observed in our renarrations of the story of the Samaritan woman and Jesus (Dube 1996, 46).

### Dehumanization

An African American engagement with this account should take notice of how imperial domination contributes to the historical process of dehumanization. The narrative encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman carries with it the burden of such a troubled history (Callahan 2007, 192). The Samaritan woman was *dehumanized* and marginalized on several levels. As the text indicates, she is nameless, a woman, a foreigner, and an outcast from the perspective of the Judaism of her day (Lee-Pollard 1992, 23).

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4. "The sixth lord, which is not a 'husband' but which nevertheless reduced Samaria to political concubinage, is Rome ruling from Jerusalem through the Judean priesthood" (Callahan 2007, 192).

Not surprisingly, the history of dehumanization is long, deep, and pervasive, with women and racial-ethnic minoritized groups often being victimized. According to Cheryl Gilkes (2001, 161), “Gender and race-ethnicity, along with class, are the major sources of social inequality that have deep moral meaning.” This can also be said of the Samaritan woman. Similar to the experiences of many African American women, “who have been the victims of the longest, most sustained cultural assault experienced by any racial-ethnic-gender group,” the Samaritan has suffered from “multiple jeopardy” (197, 184–85).

In John’s historical context, Samaritans as a people were often considered outcasts, locked out, rejected from the temple service of Jerusalem, and kept away from the holy places of sacrifice. African American female preacher Ann Lightner-Fuller (2002, 114) proclaims in this regard: “And know this—there can be no joy in a city full of rejected folk, despised folk, folk who have been told that they are not good enough for the rest of society.” Phyllis Jones (1999, 33) concurs, noting that not only were the Samaritans despised and rejected by many Jews who would avoid Samaria at all costs, but they were also considered to be an *impure race* that had forsaken their heritage.

This kind of ideologically and racially/ethnically fueled assessment of a people finds unfortunate resonance with similar arguments about the impurity and racial inferiority of African and African-descended peoples. For example, David Hume—a Scottish historian, philosopher, economist, diplomat, and essayist (1711–1776)—wrote in his *Essays and Treatises*: “I am apt to suspect the negroes ... to be naturally inferior to the white. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation” (cited in Yamauchi 1996, 398, quoting Harris 1987, 19). Likewise, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel—the German philosopher best known for his philosophy of history—dismissed Africans as insignificant to history. He wrote in the *Philosophy of History*: “It is manifest that want of self-control distinguishes the character of the Negroes. This condition is capable of no development or culture, and as we have seen them at this day, such have they always been.... At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit” (cited in Harris 1987, 19; cf. Yamauchi 1996, 398).

This kind of racial philosophical speculation eventuated into an ideological and sociopolitical and religious construct, erroneously based on a skewed reading of the Bible and the application of social Darwinism.



Charles G. Seligman, applying social Darwinism to African ethnography, formulated the “Hamitic hypothesis,” which held that Caucasian Hamites, including the Egyptians, created everything of value in Africa. He wrote in 1930: “Apart from relatively late Semitic influence ... the civilizations of Africa are the civilizations of the Hamites.... The incoming Hamites were pastoral ‘Europeans’—arriving wave after wave—better armed as well as quicker witted than the dark agricultural Negroes” (cited in Yamauchi 1996, 398). This racist reading of the Bible and the evolutionary philosophy of history merged to create the Hamitic hypothesis or the curse of Ham, which is perhaps the most notorious and influential Eurocentric interpretation of a biblical passage. This reading is based on an interpretation of Gen 9, combined with generalizations made from the Table of Nations in Gen 10. This interpretation became quite popular with the development of the African slave trade in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, because it offered biblical justification for an inhumane practice (Yamauchi 1996, 398–400).

What is quite interesting is that the ideological and socioreligious constructions and interpretations of Samaritan racial-religious inferiority and African American racial-religious inferiority seem to have originated in and gained support from Jewish midrash (Yamauchi 1996, 400). With regard to one midrash (fifth century CE), Noah says to Ham, “You have prevented me from doing something in the dark [sc. cohabitation], therefore your seed will be ugly and dark-skinned” (Midr. Gen. Rab. 36.7; Freedman and Simon 1939, 1:293).

Few African American preachers whose sermons I have read to this point, male or female, have given serious attention along these lines to the Jewish criticism of Samaritan religion as corrupt, idolatrous, and distorted, or to the fact that Jesus includes himself directly in the we/you or Jews/Samaritans dichotomy, in which Jesus clearly identifies in this context with the Jews (i.e., Judeans over against the Samaritans).<sup>5</sup> Even more, Jesus adds: “For salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22). Few have viewed this passage as analogous to the European criticism of black Christianity as somehow inferior and incomplete in comparison to European Christianity. African Americans’ Christian religious

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5. I surveyed *The African American Pulpit* serial from its inception in 1997 through 2002 as a representative sample. Of this five-year sample there were only four sermons that addressed the woman of Samaria in John 4. I make my observations from these four sermons.



expression was considered as a hybrid Christianity, a “folk religion.”<sup>6</sup> I cannot help noticing a contemporary interpreter of John 4 describing the Samaritan woman as “unschooled, without influence, despised, *capable only of folk religion*” (Carson 1991, 216, emphasis added).

Perhaps the reason for this oversight is that many African American preachers and interpreters benightedly identify with Judaism/Jews because Jesus identifies with the Jews in John 4. However, Jesus stands opposed to Judeans in other passages within John’s Gospel. One must also keep in mind that “imperialism expounds an ideology of inferior knowledge and invalid religious faith of those who must be colonized.... There is a sharp division between those who know, the colonizers, and those who know nothing, the colonized. Thus the Samaritan woman is characterized as an ignorant native (v. 10) and in need of help (v. 10)” (Dube 1996, 51). Thus, as in the experience of the Samaritan woman, African Americans can see how imperialism affects views of religion and religious practices, and contributes to the process of dehumanization.

### Rehumanization

In the process of *rehumanizing* the Samaritan woman, it is important to note that what makes Jesus’s ministry and message appealing to African American readers is that Jesus himself shares in the human experience of dehumanization. Even his geographical region of origin comes under critical scrutiny from other Jews: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). Within the Johannine narrative, Jesus and the Samaritan woman share the same experience of rejection, although in different ways.

Moreover, the Samaritan woman is not only rejected and marginalized as an individual, but she also belongs to a people who have been subject to inherited social prejudice because of their origin, and, in the case of the woman, simply because she is a woman. To be sure, Jesus is rejected in Judea by his own people and goes as part of his divine mission to Samaria (4:4), where he finds a hearing and hospitality. “The woman,” writes Okure (2009, 409; cf. 407–9), “living on the fringe of her society, goes to the well as part of her daily assigned chores and is welcomed by Jesus and placed at the center of his missionary efforts there.” From this encounter, the Samaritan

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6. As unfortunately exemplified in the work of black scholar Joseph R. Washington (1970), whose assessment builds on distorted views developed and proposed by Europeans.

woman discovers a newfound dignity and self-worth that heretofore she had not experienced. All those aspects of her humanity—race/ethnicity, gender, and class—are in the process of being restored; indeed, she is *rehumanized* by this encounter with Jesus.

For many preachers and readers, Jesus crosses boundaries and breaks various kinds of barriers—race, ethnicity, class, religion, gender. African American women preachers have also made this important observation. In this regard, Little (2002, 90) declares Jesus to be a “bondage breaker”:

I see a bondage breaker. I said, I see a bondage breaker right here.... Jesus the Christ is talking to Sister-girl. Don't you know that's revolutionary and releasing right there; a bondage is being broken right there? It's crossing an uncharted boundary right there—Sister-girl is talking to Jesus. Well, preacher; what bondage is being broken? Well, I'm glad you asked. Some bondages are being broken between inferiors and superiors.... What bondages are being broken here? The chosen and the rejected—the boundary of classism. Jesus is saying, “I'm breaking this boundary 'cause I'm asking this woman for a drink of water.” Don't you know that Jesus' ministry is not bound by social convention? It's not locked in by old traditions and old clichés that are worn out and don't mean anything.

In the same homiletic vein, Jones (1999, 34) observes: “Not only does he break with the custom and tradition of gender relations by talking to her, but he is a Jew at that.” Sherman Hicks agrees with this assessment. For him, “This is so typical of the ‘surprise element’ in the stories involving Jesus. You never quite know what to expect.... Jesus threw out the two principles concerning women and Samaritans” (Hicks 1999, 29–30).

Many interpreters have emphasized also that Jesus is crossing boundaries or breaking barriers throughout this narrative. Alan Culpepper (1983, 137; cf. Keener 2003, 591–601, 612; O'Day 1998, 383–84) writes: “Gradually the social and religious barriers separating man from woman and Jew from Samaritan are crossed. Although the disciples are more surprised that Jesus is speaking to a woman than that he is speaking to a Samaritan (John 4:27), neither distinction matters to Jesus.” This theme is so prevalent that it has been suggested that the crossing of boundaries might just be the primary theme of the narrative as a whole (Løland 2009, 115).

Through his dialogue with the Samaritan woman, Jesus gradually leads her to recognize for herself that she can transcend the barriers of prejudice and the stigmas of racism and sexism that have shaped her reality. He offers

her the opportunity to know God anew and to accept God's free gift of living water, which is the source of her new life and new perspective (Okure 2009, 409). The African American preacher who recognizes this new reality gleaned from the narrative can confidently proclaim to her audience:

She's finally started to see Jesus with new eyesight. That's why we need a new focus on the Lord Jesus Christ: because many of us have been looking at Jesus with old eyesight, and that's why we can't move any farther.... We can't keep looking at things in the old perspective.... Water pots were no longer her number one priority. Her mind had been liberated. Her mind was now full of a new discovery. She had a new focus. (Little 2002, 91–92)

Although the Samaritan woman remains nameless in a patriarchal culture, she is affirmed in the narrative over against the male socioreligious establishment that dehumanizes her. The woman's gender, race/ethnicity, and perhaps personal lifestyle unite in the mind of her Jewish counterparts to make her a nonentity, a nonbeing. Jesus, however, takes seriously and restores her *humanity*. He affirms her worth by leading her into a journey of self-discovery precisely at those points where a patriarchal and religious establishment deems her and others unworthy (Lee-Pollard 1992, 27).

African American readers and hearers of liberative sermons on this narrative are also challenged to share in the Samaritan woman's new reality. In challenging a sexist and unjustified moralizing reading of this passage, Little (2002, 91) proclaims insightfully again:

Now if we read it with a prejudice or sexist perception, we'll miss the main message that Jesus and Sister have for us today.... I want to deprogram us, sisters, because some of us need to be deprogrammed. Our minds are programmed and stuck on Sister-girl being told to go call her husband. And so I want to deprogram us and get our mind off Sister-girl's lifestyle, get your mind off of her moral background. Wipe that out of your vision. I don't want you to get stuck on Jesus having told her that the one that she had then wasn't her husband. I don't want you to get stuck on the five husbands she had had. If you're there, get unstuck from there. Don't stay there. We know this text serves to let us know we can't hide nothing from Jesus. Jesus has the ability to know and to see all things. Jesus is omnipotent and omniscient.

Little admonishes her audience to see with fresh eyes and renewed insight the liberation of the Samaritan woman from the shackles of sexism and moral stigmatism. Once the audience can see with new insight how Jesus

liberates the Samaritan woman from these shackles, they can also see how Jesus's new focus on "worship in spirit and truth" (4:23) continues this theme of breaking barriers and shackles that separate and divide human beings. In the representation of values portrayed in this narrative, traditional places and practices of worship relinquish their value and cede place to God's barrier-breaking action in human life (Okure 2009, 409). For African American preachers and interpreters, John 4 shows that no religious practice, holy place, or human institution can claim priority of place or value over that of the individual heart that is open and receptive to the life-giving presence of the Spirit.

While Jesus in this debate includes himself directly in the religious dichotomy between Jews and Samaritans by *apparently* identifying his religious allegiance to Judaism (for Jesus says, "Salvation is from the Jews," 4:22), Allen Callahan (2007, 212 n. 12, 192, emphasis added) points to "the same syntax appear[ing] in Luke 7:71 to speak of deliverance from enemies" and argues that "the proper translation of this sentence is, 'For it is salvation *from* the Judeans.'" This slight nuance in translation offers significant insight for interpretation and preaching. The phrase could mean that Jesus is offering the Samaritan woman and her people liberation from Judaism's hegemonic reign over their lives and religious quests. Now, no social group, people, or nation can make exclusive religious claims; all people must approach God on the equal footing of "worshiping in spirit and truth" (4:24), the quality and value of which is determined by God alone.

This narrative helps us consider how religious differences contribute to human views and values that categorize and marginalize others. African American preachers have been attuned to such categorization and marginalization in their own historic experiences, and have found Jesus's example instructive. This is why Jones (1999, 35–36) can say in her sermon regarding this passage: "Jesus is interested in the kingdom of God, and Jesus will not be sidetracked by a meaningless distinction between people.... Don't you see, Jesus deals with people in the true circumstances of their lives? Our circumstances are part and parcel of who we are." Charles Adams (2001–2002, 64–65) makes note in his sermon "Drunk on the Eve of Reconstruction" of the transformation that may come with a different reading of the Bible:

When we came to America as slaves, we accepted the white man's edition of Christianity, filtered it through our own African experience, and

restored it to the New Testament's key signature of universal love.... We had only heard from others that the Bible said, "Slaves, obey your master!" But when we learned how to read, we discovered where to read and what to read.... Masters took the Bible and beat us over the head with it. We took it off of our heads and put it in our hearts and used it to glorify God, bless humanity, and set all people free.

As for the so-called curse of Ham, Adams (2001–2002, 65) declares that it is Jesus who demolished the veracity and validity of this racist myth:

Wrapped up in human flesh. He was born in Bethlehem, dressed in swaddling clothes, laid in a manger, baptized in the Jordan, hated by the world, forsaken by friends, oppressed by enemies, persecuted by the government, arrested like a criminal, beaten by a mob, nailed to the cross, wounded in the side, and crucified on Calvary.... God died to make us holy, and God lives to make us free. We do not belong to Noah. We belong to God. Noah cursed us; but God blessed us. Noah condemned US; but God justified us. Noah demeaned US; but God delivered us. Noah put us down; but God picked us up.

### The Samaritan Woman and Mission

African American peoples believe that Jesus's teachings and example lift them above the baseless claims of racist myths that relegated them to a second-class, substandard, and subordinate status to a status of equality with all other human beings. In the same way, African American preachers and interpreters have argued that Jesus also, through his words and deeds, lifts women to equal status with men (Williams 2004). As in his encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus recognizes all women as persons of worth, conversing with them as intelligent and gifted individuals, and does not consider them in a second-class position. The Samaritan woman apparently perceives Jesus's intentions to evangelize Samaria when the male disciples do not. In recognizing and acting on this new reality that she discovers from her encounter with Jesus, "Sister-girl from Samaria becomes a powerful witness, a bold witness, a woman evangelist in Samaria, a proclaimer of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Little 2002, 93). Most of the sermons I have examined recognize and emphasize this point.

The Samaritan woman's missionary function in this account is apparently evident in the dialogue between Jesus and his male disciples (4:31–38). A clear indication is arguably found in 4:38, where the

verb ἀποστέλλειν (“to send”) is used. This verb is used to signify missionary action in other places in the Gospel of John, such as in 20:21, “As the Father has sent [ἀπέσταλκέν] me, so do I send [πέμπω] you.” More significantly, this verb is found in 17:18, “As you [Father] sent me [ἀπέστειλας] into the world, so I sent [ἀπέστειλα] them into the world,” which precedes the prayer “for those who believe in me through their word” (17:20). The verb ἀποστέλλειν in 4:38 also precedes the references to those who believe in Jesus through the woman’s word (4:39, 42; Brown 1978, 188; cf. n. 33).

To be sure, the Samaritans believe initially because of the woman’s word (διὰ τὸν λόγον ... πιστεύομεν, 4:39, 42). Raymond Brown (1978, 187) notes that “this expression is significant because it occurs again in Jesus’ ‘priestly’ prayer for his disciples: ‘It is not for these alone that I pray, but also for those who believe in me through their word [πιστευόντων διὰ τοῦ λόγου]’” (17:20). The narrative confirms that the testimony (λόγος, “word”) of the Samaritan woman ignited the faith of many other Samaritans to believe in Jesus (4:39). Although some Samaritans later give the woman only partial credit for their faith in Jesus (4:42), there is in this story, at the very least, a report about the first woman missionary to the Samaritans. Thus, Felder (1998, 145) writes, “Although there is neither a laying on of hands nor other formal sign of commissioning, this woman volunteers and functions as a minister to her people, despite some hesitancy on the part of her own people to accept her as such.”

Nevertheless, the woman’s initial witness opens the door to evangelism and allows Jesus to enter the Samaritan village and give his own “word” (λόγος, 4:41). For Callahan (2007, 192), “The ‘word’ ... that the Samaritan woman and her fellow countrymen receive so enthusiastically is liberation from the ideological and political pressure that Judea had exerted on the Samaritans for centuries. For the Samaritans, the word of Jesus is ‘salvation from the Judeans.’” Is this why they receive Jesus’s word so enthusiastically and declare him “the savior of the world” (v. 42)? Whatever the nature and content of Jesus’s word, the fact remains that it was the woman of Samaria at the well who hears it first, is liberated by it, and then shares it with others.

As a representative of her people, the Samaritan woman is the first to experience Jesus taking risks, reversing expectations, and crossing boundaries at the well! As Jones (1999, 37) triumphantly proclaims in the dynamic moment of womanist preaching, in which telling the story is important: “This woman whose five marriages scandalized the community,

this woman who was living in adultery, this woman who was shunned by her community, this woman of ill-repute and questionable character, told her story. We, too, must tell our stories.... Share your experience. You have your story, and I have mine.” African American interpreters and preachers have not only examined and explored in writing as well as shared in sermons the Samaritan woman’s story, but they have also seen their own stories and experiences with God and with the world more insightfully through hers. I think that even more insight can be gained in the African American homiletic and interpretive tradition if we join in dialogue with other marginalized others in how they read and interpret the Samaritan woman’s experience.

### Cross-Cultural Challenges and Confirmations

While I have read and examined this account from a liberative *rehumanizing* perspective that is in keeping with much of the African American interpretive and homiletic tradition, I would be remiss if I did not give ear and attention to some cross-cultural challenges to and confirmations of this reading. If social, religious, and political contexts inform interpretation, then different contexts invite multiple and inevitably differing reading perspectives and conclusions.

#### Cross-Cultural Challenges

There are some cross-cultural challenges that invite deeper scrutiny of John 4 and my liberative *rehumanizing* reading. Jing (Cathy) Zhang, a Chinese biblical scholar, observes with regard to the missionary function of the Samaritan woman that the woman’s townspeople believe in Jesus not because the woman tells them that *Jesus is the Messiah* but because of the woman’s testimony (“He told me everything I have ever done,” 4:39). Moreover, in verse 42 her people claim, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves.” After making these two observations, Zhang (2007, 17) comments:

No one is honoring this woman for bridging her people and Jesus. How can we say she is a successful evangelizer when no one from her town wants to give her the credit? Besides, to emphasize the mission to Samaria too much is making the Gospel an imperialist text. Such interpretation really bears the imperialist print by making the woman of the foreign land a contact zone of receiving the imperialist ideas.

Zhang further observes that Chinese churches, in keeping with this imperialist emphasis on the immorality of native peoples, like to stress the immoral life of the Samaritan woman, depicting her as a carnal woman whose sexual desire cannot be quenched before she meets Jesus. "Preachers," she notes, "like to teach the congregation that they should not be like this woman to get indulged in the lascivious desire but should come to Jesus for the living water and eternal life in heaven" (Zhang 2007, 17). Such preaching neglects the sexual victimization of women and young girls. Thus, Zhang (18–19) concludes, in keeping with her cultural context,

In Chinese society ... the sub-consciousness ... is to accuse the victimized girls or women as a seductive source for such crime. I hope in the Chinese churches, we can pay more attention to the stories of the women who have suffered sexual abuses and extend our hands to them to offer practical help. It is not enough to ask them to repent their sins and convert to Christian faith. It is important to be in solidarity with them, sharing their fear and shame, carrying them through the trauma and offering our love to them.

In a similar vein, Jean Kim, a Korean scholar, argues, like Zhang, that the Samaritan woman never really recognizes the actual identity of Jesus as the Messiah and that, although the woman brings her people to Jesus and they later confess that Jesus is the savior of the world, neither Jesus nor her own people ever approve of her, even once. As a matter of fact, the townspeople's rejection of the Samaritan woman's *indirect* witness on account of their *direct* dialogue with Jesus and his disciples shows that the woman is not a missionary. On the contrary, she is a victimized woman whose purpose is to exemplify the role of an exchange object between groups of men. Thus, Kim refuses to read this account as a story of mission. In her estimation, the narrative reveals the Samaritan woman's victimization (instead of liberation, as in the African American reading tradition). Kim, therefore, cannot accept the traditional moralizing reading of this narrative or its suggestions regarding the woman's missionary role.

The cultural context of some Korean women's experience influences her reading, especially because of the "comfort women" during the World War II. These women were victims of war who also shared the experience of "living with a man who was not her husband" in the Korean context. Instead of receiving sympathy and assistance, these women were regarded as immoral women, whom male pastors urge to repent of their sins and whom their native people deserted. Kim (1997, 119) concludes, "The



Samaritan woman's story cannot be told as an example of mission, or of the conversion of an immoral person, but as a prophetic voice of victimized women against imperialism."

Finally, Musa W. Dube, a Botswanan scholar, observes that the story of the Samaritan woman, who represents her nation and who is willing to receive living water, is used to support the ideology of Christian mission. She writes, "Imperialist ideology of subjugation constructs extremely gendered discourse. The lands that must be subjugated are equated to a woman, and narratives about the penetration of distant lands feature a woman" (Dube 1996, 52). This passage is used then as an imperializing narrative, authorizing traveling to and entering into foreign cultures and lands. For her reading and her historical-cultural context, this narrative cannot be read as empowering or used to propose relations of liberating interdependence between races, cultures, and genders.

In Dube's postcolonial Third World feminist reading, the Samaritan woman represents a contact zone for imperial advance and is therefore a victim. She is not the perfect model of discipleship or mission at all. An often-repeated African saying—"When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us, 'Let us pray.' After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible" (Dube 1996, 37)—underscores Dube's argument that the Bible is one of the premier texts of European imperialism and colonialism. As Dube (43) remarks, "For many African nations the success of colonization is inseparably linked with the use of the Bible."

### Cross-Cultural Confirmations

While the above cultural-contextual critiques of a liberative *rehumanizing* reading serve to temper and balance the African American liberation hermeneutic, liberative approaches and assessments of this narrative in global reading communities can confirm and encourage the African American interpretive and homiletic tradition.

In Bangladesh, Mukti Barton, a Bangladeshi scholar, makes the observation that much of the contemporary development work in Bangladesh is not concerned about valuing the poor or transforming the oppressive structure that perpetuates poverty. In relating the story of the Samaritan woman to her cultural context, Barton notes that Jesus does not dig a well in the woman's house to solve her problem; the Samaritan woman will solve her own problems. However, unless the oppressive structure of her

society stops undermining the Samaritan woman's efforts at self-improvement, she remains helpless.

Therefore, for Barton (2016, 9), "Jesus does not merely free an individual, but the structure as well. Neither does he create dependency on himself. Jesus becomes close to her [the Samaritan woman] in order to set her free. The work of Jesus is to value her so much that she learns to value herself and in her turn to bring new life to others." She remarks further:

After contextual study of this gospel story in one of the workshops, some village women with little education suddenly saw themselves and Jesus with new eyes.... When women in Bangladesh understand how badly the church has represented Jesus, and above all God, to women, they realize [that] the gospel tradition contains truths about God and about human nature that are far deeper than they have ever imagined. Women find this particular story packed full of good news. The more they dig, the more they find treasures in it. They see this woman in their scriptural tradition as a theologian, a preacher and a missionary. (13)

Barton reads John 4 from her context, in which women are poor and exploited by oppressive systems and traditions, but they can exert agency and resolve when they perceive such structures.

Lizette Galima Tapia-Raquel, a Filipina scholar, looks at the narrative of Jesus and the Samaritan woman from a Filipina's perspective. Given her nation's history of colonization alongside conversion and evangelism, Tapia-Raquel explores the text from the perspective of a woman and as a member of a colonized people. She recognizes that in Philippines' experience, the Spanish came with the cross and the sword, and the Americans came with the Bible and the gun. This social-historical reality causes her to critique John 4 as a necessary step in honoring the memory of the Messiah, Jesus, who lived his life for the poor and marginalized until he was executed. She proffers,

It is imperative that we differentiate the Jesus of the poor and the Jesus of Christendom. The Jesus of the poor, lest we forget was not a Christian. He was a Jew. The Jesus of the poor may declare his Jewishness but will assert that we are all children of God; he will offer water and life for all, especially communities in need and will have no need to declare to be the "living water"; he will offer salvation to those who need God the most and will have no desire to declare that salvation comes from the Jews (or from Christians!); and the Jesus of the poor says, "the spirit of the Lord is upon me, he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He

has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the regaining of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Tapia-Raquel 2012)

Tapia-Raquel recognizes, like many African Americans (esp. Douglass 1999),<sup>7</sup> that Jesus the liberator of the poor and oppressed is usually transformed in colonial/imperial regimes into Jesus the captor and domesticator of the poor and oppressed. Instead of a Jesus who transforms social conditions and encourages freedom, the poor and oppressed are offered a Jesus who counsels them to conform to their unjust social conditions.

Finally, Surekha Nelavala, a Dalit scholar from India, offers our final cross-cultural confirmation. Dalits are considered untouchables by virtue of their caste and have been treated inhumanely for almost three thousand years. "Official degradation, fixed low status, permanent social stigma, complexity of inferiority, ongoing physical repression, a sense of shame, and legitimate untouchability have been typical features of Dalit life in India" (Nelavala 2007, 3). Although Dalits were given constitutional and equal rights after India's independence in 1947, their social plight has not changed much in reality. They continue to suffer from the historic stigma of untouchability with varying degrees of intensity, depending on different times and settings.

Coming from such a context, Nelavala proposes the need to reread scriptures from a Dalit feminist point of view to affirm identity and provide dignity. Her hermeneutic begins with a question: "Can the Biblical text do this for Dalits?" (Nelavala 2007, 3). The "this" in her question includes the liberation of both Dalits and Jesus! Her Dalit feminist hermeneutic emphasizes the role of the oppressor's openness to self-liberation and reconciliation as essential principles for the liberation of the oppressed. Thus, a reading from a Dalit perspective of the story of the Samaritan woman "suggests a paradigm shift to interpret Jesus' act as primarily a self-liberating act that comes from self-transformation and reconciliation which is crucial for Jesus himself, first to meet his physical need and second to fulfill his own mission" (3). Nelavala (5) clarifies further:

Contemporary scholars have rightly pointed out the radicality of Jesus' initiative in his crossing gender, ethnic and moral boundaries in order to

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7. The goal of Douglass's scathing attack in this piece is slaveholding Christianity and not "true" Christianity.

reach out to the Samaritan woman, which brings her liberation. While affirming the deep sensitivity that Jesus had for the marginalized, and his radical initiative to cross boundaries of gender, ethnicity and morality in his ministry, I also argue as a Dalit feminist that his initiative for crossing boundaries is first a self-transformative act.

Thus the story of the Samaritan woman in a Dalit cultural context exemplifies mutual reconciliation and suggests a reconciliatory model of liberation as it deconstructs the power disparity between the oppressor and the oppressed. Such a reading resonates with the political-religious philosophies of Martin Luther King Jr. (1981, esp. 150–52; cf. Roberts 2005), who argues in his sermon “My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence” that reconciliation is essential to the African American strategy for liberation. Like many other oppressed, colonized, and stigmatized persons in the global reading community, Dalits search for liberation and reconciliation. “Thus, a Dalit hermeneutic engages its conversation with biblical texts with a view that Christianity is liberating and that Jesus is the liberator” (Nelavala 2007, 4).

### Conclusion

Nelavala’s assessment of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman has brought us full circle. Like Nelavala, Tapia-Raquel, and Barton (and others in the global reading community) who offer cross-cultural confirmation of a liberative reading, the African American interpretive and homiletic tradition has found liberating, *rehumanizing* potential in John 4. Yet, the African American interpretive and homiletic tradition must also temper its liberative assessments and learn from Zhang, Kim, and Dube (and others in the global reading community) who offer cross-cultural challenges to a liberative reading of this passage. The reasons for the sometimes-conflicting evaluations have to do with the contexts—historical-cultural, social-political, and religious-philosophical—of the interpreter. In the historical-cultural, social-political, and religious-philosophical contexts of this interpreter (and others in my reading community), Jesus is a liberator who is willing to take risks, reverse expectations, and cross boundaries to *rehumanize* a dehumanized sister at a well.

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## Engagement

Ronald Charles

In the context of this volume we were asked to (re)read Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4 from our own social location. I endeavored to do so as one "from away" in various ways. Reading the other contributions, I appreciate that all the contributors managed to respect the particular framework set out for this book. In this brief reflection I show what I have learned from each author and probe some questions I think deserve further attention.

I start with Mary F. Foskett's essay. Her piece is important in the sense that she is trying to understand what it means to navigate various complex and fluid networks of identities and relationships. I was particularly struck by the way Foskett was able to weave her own narrative as an Asian American adoptee woman with the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. I appreciate how she takes the time to focus on the woman in the story, and how, by focusing on the nameless woman in the narrative, she provides a more nuanced understanding of the text. Foskett is also right in pointing out the ambiguity of ethnicity in John as a whole, especially as one tries to capture the meaning of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in this particular gospel. She states, "The meaning of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι shifts and blurs in the Fourth Gospel because it circulates narratively in multiple networks-in-motion. Interestingly, although John appears to assume the Jewish identity of Jesus and his disciples throughout the narrative, only in John 4:9 does the narrative—through the Samaritan woman's speech—explicitly refer to Jesus as Jewish." This is where I think Foskett could have investigated more why there is this explicit reference to Jesus as Jewish in 4:9, in the same way she did later in her essay in asking why John's Jesus is being identified as Samaritan. The crux of the question is that John's Jesus at this point wants to make clear the separation of "us" and "them," as I indicate in my own contribution. The narrator still struggles with the demarcation between

two poles; there is certainly tension and ambivalence, but the intent to separate the two groups is there.

Foskett, alongside other scholars, mentions the theme of hospitality in the encounter. I agree with the overarching theme of hospitality in the narrative, which casts the woman as host and Jesus as a traveler. However, reading the dialogue with empire-critical lenses may also allow one to see how the usual hospitality of the natives plays out in their own subjugation and their territories being penetrated. I am not clear how the following sentence from Foskett makes sense in the text: "Without relinquishing who they have been, both the Samaritan woman and Jesus are changed by who each other is." John's Jesus is not changed by his encounter with the woman, and it is not clear whether she is changed either. She goes out to the townsfolk and lets them know that this man has told her everything she has ever done. Could he be the Messiah? Many today who have been generous hosts to travelers with this text in hand are still asking this same question.

Second, I reflect on the contribution by the late David Arthur Sánchez. The maroon analogy used at the beginning of the essay captures Sánchez's methodological standpoint well. He moves out of the plantation/guild in order to plan and plot to come back incognito to interrogate and disturb the hegemonic points of reference. I appreciate that he takes some time to theorize about what he is doing. The scholars he cites are key thinkers in his questioning and upsetting of some of the traditional interpretations related to the story of interest. What I find fascinating in the field (plantation) of biblical studies is how the politics of citation operates. Sánchez cites authors who have been at the forefront of emphasizing the importance of social location in one's interpretation and the need to understand the role and the fetishization of the Bible as an instrument of terror and domestication. Yet, when one reads, it is as if many if not most scholars in the field/plantation of New Testament studies do not exist or what they do is not of any importance. Sánchez elaborates in many ways from the perspective I develop in my own interpretation, although his is from the perspective of a Chicano, namely, parsing John 4 "as a mandate for aggressive and sexualized missionizing in an othered, feminized, and ethnically exotic land." Sánchez shows that the text manages to prioritize "foreign (Jesus, Jewish, living water) over regional (unnamed woman, Samaritan, well water)" and "masculine over feminine, and Christian over Samaritan." The label "Christian" at this particular juncture is anachronistic and problematic for several reasons, but the point is well presented.

Certainly, the nameless Samaritan woman is sanctioned and has become not only John's theological mouthpiece but also one of the champions for later interpreters to articulate a Christian missionizing enterprise that has left many weary of hearing about saviors from Western spokespersons.

"I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink" (Matt 25:35) is to me one of the most moving passages in the Christian Bible. It is on the persistent and urgent issue of water that Mitzi J. Smith focuses her analysis. Smith's essay is an intriguing and moving interpretation of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. She manages to situate the text clearly in its ancient context while being keenly and critically aware of the ills of the present as related to the issue of water. I was particularly moved when she mentioned her mother. We both have mentioned our own mothers in the context of our readings, and there is something to be said about the vulnerability one assumes when doing so. I was intrigued by how she recognizes that the spiritual water John's Jesus may have in mind cannot possibly be a replacement for access to physical water, but she beautifully counters this understanding from a sustained theological and contextual argument that "living water functions as a unifying metaphor, transcending its symbolism—a metaphor of interdependence between two colonized peoples and freedom from total dependence on the Roman Empire as colonizer." While Jesus lived somewhere in a geographical region of origin that was looked down on—"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46)—in the first century CE and was a poor peasant living under a proxy Roman rule, John's Jesus at the end of the 90s CE is a cosmic figure who came down from heaven. This is why I think it is important to understand this encounter between this traveler and that nameless Samaritan woman in the larger context of what John is doing, namely, presenting Jesus as a traveler from above who knows everything and can do everything. Contrary to the proposal Smith advances of Jesus—he taking the time "to know her story and to acknowledge it, without condemnation or judgment"—the impression John gives is that Jesus did not need anyone to tell him anything since he knew what was in everyone (John 2:24–25).

Smith's overall argument that Jesus's offer to give running water to the Samaritan woman is a subversive and anticolonial act or political proposition is, I admit, elegant and convincing in various ways. The analysis, however, leaves me with questions I hope can be addressed: What does it mean concretely? That is, how does it make sense for flesh-and-blood readers or hearers living in their fraught spaces that "within this global framework

living water is more than a spiritual reality but becomes a physical right as well based on its significance for human life"? How is this particular message of John's Jesus offering living water relevant to countless refugees today? I am not saying that it is not, but I have difficulties, even as a preacher of the gospel, to say to those who are suffering, "All you need is to believe in Jesus, who will give you living water." Without the theological acceptance and development of Jesus as God, how does one make sense of the following sentence by Smith: "The most significant revelation in this text, given their shared context, is the free offer from God of living water, access to which no person can live without and without which no person can experience life abundantly (10:10)"? The issue of water remains prescient, and too many are still begging for clean and accessible water. Will it take a "savior of the world" to allow everyone to benefit from this basic human right?

In his contribution, Demetrius K. Williams approaches the text as an African American male scholar/interpreter and pastor/preacher. I highlight few points I find helpful and push the author to consider clarifying some statements by way of questions. First, I appreciate that Williams also considers the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman as the dialogue between two representatives: Jesus stands for the Jews and the woman is otherized as arguably a representative of Samaria's national history. The we-against-you dichotomy is clearly in view, as recognized by Williams. He goes so far as admitting that John 4 is "analogous to the European criticism of early black Christianity as somehow inferior and incomplete in comparison to European Christianity."

But Williams does not let that recognition problematize his own liberative reading of the text. After recognizing the complexities of the text and in the interpretation of the text, Williams simply brushes them all up and reverts to one's historical-cultural, social-political, and religious-philosophical contexts. Certainly, we all interpret from our own identities and spaces, but one can also move beyond that to not solely temper one's interpretation but be challenged in one's conclusion, if it is not necessary at times to even change one's premises and/or conclusions. I would like to see the evidence for the following statement: "Jesus's engagement with the Samaritan woman, however, is the beginning of reversing this toxic history, ethnoracial tension, and rival religious praxis between Jews and Samaritans." The following sentence is beautifully put, and it is true as far as it goes: "Jesus is calling the woman, and the other Samaritans, to reject colonial attachments for true spiritual leadership." But what is the evidence for that? Also, the author uses the words *race* and *racism* loosely in his piece.

Maybe it would be better to use ethnic reasoning instead of these loaded terms (Buell 2005). Finally, I need to make it clear that I do understand the social location of the author, and I do value his contribution and how he has researched how many readers/preachers from his reading communities approach the story. John's Jesus is complex, as is the presentation of the nameless Samaritan woman in the conversation. Something is happening in this dialogue between these two representatives, and we are all struggling with it. Maybe the text is inviting us, as Williams perceptively notices, to a certain gentleness, one that will give us humility to attend to various readings even when we may want to think we understand the text fully. I end with these words from Roland Barthes (1972, 16), "Les mots ont une mémoire seconde qui se prolonge mystérieusement au milieu des significations nouvelles": "Words have a second layer of memory that move mysteriously along with new meanings" (my translation).

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Mary F. Foskett

The essays by Ronald Charles, David Arthur Sánchez, Mitzi J. Smith, and Demetrius K. Williams provide an invaluable window onto key questions and concerns that shape minoritized biblical criticism in general and interpretation of John 4 in particular. I am deeply grateful for the insights each has provided as well as the difficult issues they have brought to the fore. Together, the essays have cast important light on how the ways in which readers are positioned serve to situate the texts they interpret. Each of the essays is concerned with the social realities that shape the lives of readers and situate the interpretation of biblical texts. While so doing, the readings highlight some of the tensions that emerge when engaging John 4. My reflection touches on a few of the insights and issues that have captured my attention, ones that I will surely continue to ponder for the foreseeable future.

Each author's reading of John is shaped by his or her positionality and relation to the text. Charles uses an autobiographical approach to the text,

drawing on his identity and experience as a Canadian Haitian to engage the Bible in a reading from away. The reference to being “from away” acknowledges his social location in the university town of Antigonish. In Antigonish, he is one who is out of place. For Charles, reading from away signals both the social and critical distance he brings to his reading of John 4. Charles claims his space as a minoritized biblical interpreter whose autobiography, social location, and reading stance affords a multifocal lens on both the text and its interpretation. Reading the Bible in this way, is, by his account, both a painful and exhilarating experience that embodies his dual role as a biblical critic and what he calls being “a product of the text.” His essay underscores how the experience of straddling multiple social and cultural worlds positions readers to comprehend multiple dimensions of the biblical text.

In his essay, Williams draws on postcolonial studies as well as African American biblical hermeneutics to interpret John 4. These approaches identify the social forces that forge and maintain the oppression of subject peoples. African American preaching, in particular, deploys strategies of both critique and proclamation when engaging biblical texts. Drawing on tradition that countered and lifted African Americans “above the baseless claims of racist myths that relegated them to a second-class, substandard, and subordinate status, to a status of human equality with all other human beings,” Williams’s reading of John 4 carefully traces the racial and ethnic tension in the text. He then argues that the Samaritan woman is rehumanized by and through her encounter with Jesus. His reading seeks to account for both the peril and promise that readers can find in John 4. The capaciousness of his reading is deftly illustrated by his inclusion of interpretations drawn from scholars such as Jean Kim, Musa Dube, Mukti Barton, and others. Williams listens intently to readings of John 4 that confirm the “liberating, *rehumanizing* potential” in the text that he identifies, but he takes just as seriously, if not more, those readings that intensely challenge or counter it.

The theme of rehumanization resonates with Smith’s womanist reading of John 4. She focuses on the shared need and experience of oppression that, in her reading, forges a connection between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. For Jesus and the woman, both living under the conditions of empire, water functions as a “metaphor of interdependence between two colonized peoples and freedom from total dependence on the Roman Empire as colonizer.” Reading John 4 in the ancient context of empire and in light of the contemporary setting of the water shutoffs in Detroit, Smith

lends us critical insights into the mix of sexism, racism, economic oppression, and imperialism that permeates both our world and John's story world. She concludes that Jesus's offer of "free living water to the Samaritan woman is a subversive and anticolonial act that transcends barriers of difference based on race, class, and gender," one that serves as a model for her readers.

As Williams suggests, and as Sánchez renders vividly in his essay, minoritized readings rightly make space for interpretations that move in opposite directions. Seeing "biblical cultural studies as a vital hermeneutic strategy and *art of resistance*," Sánchez reads John 4 as a story that advances "ecclesial and missionizing triumphalism" to such an extent that it dominates and suppresses other interests and dimensions of the text. Drawing on what Sánchez identifies as a Chicano optic, he sees the Samaritan woman, read alongside Doña Maria/*la Malinche*, as an archetype for "the violated, dominated, and expendable receptacle required by masculine depictions of dominant penetrations." In no way does she or the text embody the potential that the other essay writers identify in their reading of John 4.

Even as Charles and Smith call out the imperialist dimensions of the text, and Williams recognizes how readings of John 4 throughout the Global South challenge him to temper his own liberative reading, each writer offers a reading that differs significantly from the others. Together the readings demonstrate not only that biblical interpretation is rooted in the positionality of the reader, but that minoritized readings especially expose and interrogate the difficult and sharp edges of text that have been smoothed over or erased by the history of interpretation. It is clearly not the case, nor the aim, of minoritized interpretation to arrive at a single or true reading. Rather, these essays demonstrate that minoritized readings of biblical texts create space for the complexity, richness, and dissonance of the literature and its interpretation. Meaning is multiple, and truth is messy. Minoritized interpretation tolerates and respects the necessary tension that results from deep engagement with biblical texts.

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David Arthur Sánchez

When you possess it in abundance, you never stress over it. Yet, recent incidents in California have me thinking about water constantly. The water rations of 2015–2016 that resulted from the drought conditions brought on by the lack of rain in California were alarming. Green lawns turned



brown, reservoirs emptied, and the citizenry of California was mandated to adhere to enforceable water regulations. Recent fires that swept through California have also energized concerns over global warming and the vulnerability of a thoroughly parched state.

Mitzi J. Smith's article has expanded my water *living* concerns. Her ἀποκάλυψις of the Detroit water crisis and the stereotyping of dark bodies that has informed the crisis is paralyzing. She forcefully notes that "the creation of stereotypes is a convenient way to withhold resources from people and/or to treat them in discriminatory ways based on negative difference." The stereotypes most disproportionally applied in Detroit, according to Smith, are against black bodies, especially women, labeled as welfare queens. Any counterreaction to the stereotype is either categorized as a subversive or an anticolonial gesture, as Jesus's offer to provide the Samaritan women *living water* in John 4 at no charge (colonized body to colonized body), or as Aqua Nomine Caesaris (water in the name of Caesar), a gesture of imperial beneficence (colonizing body to colonized body).

Smith's diversion from the contemporary stereotyped reading of the Samaritan woman as *hypersexual* allows for new avenues of engagement with John 4 from multiple optics. I could not help but read her essay and think of the ongoing border issues between Mexico and the United States. The recent 2018 midterm elections gave me much to consider. I am struck by how much ink or airtime was spent on the immigrant caravan moving through Mexico via conservative media outlets. Citizens of the United States were coaxed to fear the "hostile" migration moving toward the southern border of the country. Members of the caravan were stereotyped as MS-13 gang members, drug dealers, terrorist agents (ISIS and Al-Qaeda opportunists) or as lazy, hypersexual Latinx women coming with their infants and adolescent hordes to take advantage of welfare benefits available in the United States. This was fearmongering in its ugliest American (i.e., US) expression. As a show of protective force, President Trump deployed the US military to protect the country against the illegal border penetration. Militia groups such as the Minutemen also deployed in force. The stereotype rhetoric worked perfectly. Under no circumstances would the metaphoric Aqua Nomine Caesaris greet the caravan.

Prior to the border hysteria brought about by that midterm election, the issue of water has long been a concern for those who would venture to cross the border between Mexico and the United States. The regular border patrol policing of the Southwest has been most acute at official border



crossing passageways and a few miles to either direction of those policed crossings. The result on migrants was that their points of entry were moved to the least populated and harshest areas of the Sonoran Desert. More often than not, this added time to the crossing and the increased necessity of water for survival. For years, groups sympathetic to those on migration would leave bottles of water along strategic paths frequented by migrants, life-sustaining water in the 110-plus-degrees average temperature of the Sonoran Desert. *Living water*. And for as many years as support groups have provided water along heavily traveled migrant paths, border patrol agents, local ranchers, police agencies, and militias have made it a practice to spill that *living water* on the desert floor. Surely enough deaths at the hands of thirst and heat exhaustion would deter any future attempts to enter the United States. (Since 2001, almost three thousand recorded heat-related deaths have occurred in the Southwest border area. That would be approximately 266 deaths per year.)

I am appreciative of Smith's redirection of my attention from the overexegeted sex life of the Samaritan woman toward a countercolonial, subversive reading through the lens of womanism. Through her subjective reading of John 4, I have expanded my subjective reading of John 4, and she has certainly convinced me that "Water Is a Human Right, but It *Ain't* Free."

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Mitzi J. Smith

While each essay brings contemporary and/or cultural contexts into conversation with the biblical text, we do so differently. Our papers show that even when we explicitly identify a cultural and/or contemporary social-justice perspective or framework for reading a particular biblical text, the degree to which we privilege the biblical texts, the Eurocentric exegetical method, or the cultural context varies. We approach the interpretive task differently; we position ourselves diversely and name our positionalities distinctively. In David Arthur Sánchez's essay, he positions himself theoretically as an intellectual maroon who employs cultural biblical studies as a hermeneutical resistance strategy within the academic biblical studies guild. After briefly discussing the theory of minoritized biblical criticism, Sánchez delves into the interpretive history of the Samaritan woman that foregrounds the religious conversion of the Samaritan woman as the other and Jesus as her cultural and ethical superior. Although both Mary F. Foskett and I discuss how interpreters portray the Samaritan woman as sinful,

Sánchez employs the interpretive history to compare the Samaritan woman as an evangelized sinful woman with the penetrated colonized native who abandons the local for the foreign. Sánchez's reading is a Chicano interrogation of John 4. Foskett reads John 4:1–42 as an Asian American adoptee. While Asian American adoptees, born in East and Southeast Asia but adopted generally by white families and raised in the United States, recognize themselves in John's depiction of the Samaritan woman, poor nonwhite women in Detroit and Flint, Michigan, who are denied access to water or to clean water may not recognize themselves in John's portrayal. Having said that, they are certainly similarly stereotyped in the ways the interpreters have presumed to know and fabricate the Samaritan woman's story; like her, they have a right to living water. Similarly, Foskett argues that the experience of Asian American adoptees in the United States is marked by invisibility, as well as stereotyping, exclusion, and racism.

After describing her project, Foskett extensively delineates her interpretative lens, which is the history, identity, and experience of Asian American adoptees, most of whom were born in South Korea or China. Their experience includes being questioned about their racial and ethnic identity, personal histories, and familial dissonance. Any inability to answer such questions suggests that the adoptees are somehow incomplete. Assumptions about and questions posed to the adoptees are often internalized, leading to feelings of being incomplete and intensifying the stigma and marginalization of their experience as adoptees. Foskett, relying on the work of Bruno Latour, argues that Asian American adoptees function as actors within multiple dynamic networks, including the adoptive kinship network, and both human and nonhuman actors contribute to the complexity and fluidity of identity formation. Next, Foskett offers a rereading of John 4 alongside Asian American adoptees; this allows her to read "with a heightened sensitivity to how one reads from within a network to also see how the narrative assembles the social and situates [the Samaritan woman]." Thus, Foskett begins with the network of interpreters who impose their presumptions about the Samaritan woman's character and familiarity with her ethnic and gender identity onto their reading of her. While the experiences and history of Asian American adoptees inform how Foskett rereads the biblical story, and, like Sánchez and me, she begins with a delineation of the cultural or interested contextual lens, she compartmentalizes her rereading, reading alongside the text in ways that generally in my view maintain the exegetical boundaries. Foskett rereads the biblical story with the impact of dynamic networks on identity

formation, but Asian American adoptees are not mentioned in the section of her essay that actually rereads John 4. Differently, I attempt to construct a dialogue throughout the essay between the experiences and stories of poor African American women as victims of the privatization of water and the biblical story, and also do so with the employment of critical race and postcolonial theory. A similar exegetical compartmentalization is also evident in Ronald Charles's and Demetrius K. Williams's essays. In his essay, Williams produces a rehumanizing and liberative reading of the story from African American reading perspective: African Americans from a dehumanizing tradition sought to rehumanize sacred texts. Williams argues that it is hermeneutically unsound to translate a text into one's own context without first delineating the biblical text's "own historical-political context and setting." Differently from Foskett, Sánchez, and myself, Williams analyzes the narrative and historical context thematically and structurally before offering a "liberative rehumanizing reading in African American interpretive and homiletic perspectives."

Foskett, Charles, Williams, and I attempt to avoid making (negative and unsubstantiated) assumptions about the Samaritan woman that the text does not support—assumptions about why she arrives at the well at midday, her living arrangements, her sexual history, and animosity between Jews and Samaritans. Sometimes we succeed and sometimes we fail. The narrator interjects and presumes a putative knowledge of historical animosity between Jews and Samaritans, and, in reality, deep racial-ethnic-religious divisions die hard, if at all, and vestiges linger. I do not presume the ethnic-religious breach to be absolute, however; nothing is absolute. Foskett is correct that relationships between peoples are always more fluid and complex than sacred and other texts allow.

Our essays diverge and converge in our readings. Like Foskett, Williams's reading of the scripture in its literary and history-political context concludes by noting the universal significance of Jesus. But Williams also argues that Jesus is subversively identified as "savior of the world" and represents a call to "reject colonial attachments for true spiritual leadership." I similarly conclude that this recognition of John's Jesus is subversive to the Roman Empire, but so is Jesus's declaration that he can give the Samaritan woman living water. Sánchez argues that the acceptance of Jesus as the savior of the world demonstrates a rejection of the local for the foreign. Regarding genre, Foskett and I reject Robert Alter's identification of John 4 as a betrothal scene. Following Arthur Arterbury, we argue that it is a hospitality type-scene. Foskett argues that Jesus reverses "the context of

hospitality,” showing that the Samaritan woman needs the hospitality that he can provide. Differently, I argue that the hospitality is mutual; Jesus needs her vessel to retrieve the water to quench his thirst, and she needs living, free-flowing, perennially accessible water.

In her final paragraph, Foskett explicitly identifies the hermeneutical connections between the Samaritan woman and the experience of Asian American adoptees: past and present networks constitute the social and the process of identity formation in both the lives of adoptees and that of the Samaritan woman in John’s Gospel. Networks impact and are impacted as people navigate, transform, expand them. Foskett embraces the transformation that she argues occurs within the story of the Samaritan woman and asserts that “all can be hosts and guests” in John and perhaps in Asian American adoption networks. But Sánchez views this notion of transformation occurring at the end of the story as negative.

Our essays are concurrent and conflicting; they overlap and diverge, not just in our obviously diverse interpretative cultural lenses but also in structure, the degree to which we integrate exegesis (more aptly, all exegesis is eisegesis, as Fernando F. Segovia asserted more than a decade ago) and our cultural contexts, and in some hermeneutical conclusions. Some differences can be attributed to our distinct hermeneutical frameworks and others to our experiences as individuals. Regardless, context always matters.

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Demetrius K. Williams

In several ways I view this current volume on minoritized biblical criticism and its contributions as a continuation of and important companion to the earlier volume, *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism* (Bailey, Liew, and Segovia 2009). First, the editors asked each contributor in this volume to examine a single passage from the contributor’s own social location as a minoritized subject. In the earlier volume (in which I was a participant), each contributor chose their own passage of interest (this is not to say, however, that the contributors failed to offer significant and salient contextual interrogations of the various biblical passages chosen). Second, what makes the present volume particularly engaging to me is that the participants have the opportunity to respond to each another’s contributions. Third, this is what enhances the volume, for me, because each contributor has the opportunity to learn from the critical and collegial insight offered by the other contributors.

Perhaps, for this reason, *sight* is the operative element in my response to my colleagues' examinations of John 4 because as I read each contribution, I felt like the blind man of Bethesda whose sight is restored slowly and progressively by Jesus (Mark 8:22–26). Each contributor helped to remove unexpected and hidden blinders from my eyes as I read their minoritized insights on John 4.

Ronald Charles weaves his examination of John 4 as one “from away,” using an autobiographical method that focuses on his own experience and that attempts to bracket other scholarship (which he admits is not totally achievable). What he means by “from away” is reading John 4 “from a critical distance, as a reader quite aware of how the New Testament texts were (are being) used to justify colonization of the Two-Thirds world. [He] read[s] the texts with [his] feet firmly planted on the ground and knowing that these texts have been used (are being used) to legitimize oppressive structures of all sorts (gender, sexuality, class, economics, culture, race, ethnicity, politics, and so on).” He helped me to see the potential of an autobiographical reading of John 4. He invited me to share in his story and participate in his journey away from his familiar surroundings and community of origin. But he also exposes its limitations (at least, perhaps, in his employment of the method). His powerful statement above on the historical use of biblical texts to legitimize oppression, colonization, and so on was not evidenced consistently (or satisfactorily in my estimation) in his examination of John 4. The stitching of the various parts or segments of his work as outlined in his introduction seemed too disjointed and could easily be read individually as independent pieces (for example, “John 4 in Its Immediate Context” served little purpose to advance his argument). I found it difficult to see how the parts fit adequately together. At any rate, I think a critical engagement with other scholarship would have helped to enhance his reading of John 4 and heighten the biting edge of his critical stance and distance as one from away. Nevertheless, his contribution foregrounding his personal and painful journey of conscientization and its results is shared by others who are critical readers from away or who read away from the center in the margins.

Mary F. Foskett reads John 4 alongside Asian American adoptees and engages the text with a recognition of how identity is formed and produced in and through networks. She notes that “it is networks, not fixed contexts or social forces, that make up what we call ‘the social.’” Thus, identity formation and social belonging do not depend on “static notions of homeland, heritage, family, or nationality, but on networks that

are dynamic and associations that are always in motion.” From this interpretive perspective, Foskett notes that neither Asian American adoptees nor the woman of Sychar represent static communities; their identity and personhood are embedded in networks in which they are able to navigate, change, and expand. In this regard, she has heightened my own vision and sensitivity as to how one reads from within a network to explore “how narrative assembles the social and situates [the Samaritan woman].” She has also helped me to see that the Bible has also functioned in countless networks, suggesting that “rather than speaking of contextualized readings, where interpreters work in and from fixed contexts or locations of intersectionality, it may be more useful to conceptualize interpretation as that which occurs within networks of readers and other actors.” This suggestion is duly noted. However, one need not push too forcefully the notion of contextual as static either. The contextual can also hold within its orbit the fluidity of social networks as changing and expanding (contexts change too), and, in addition, the concept of intersectionality also recognizes that social identities and locations are constantly changing as situations and contexts change. Without a doubt, networks are also formed within and are affected by empire and imperial prerogatives. I wanted to hear something about how the empire of the United States affects or influences the networks that Asian American adoptees live in. For example, how has the model minority concept been manipulated to fuel the fires of division among various minoritized groups in the United States? How might the Samaritan-Jew dichotomy in John 4 shed light on this issue? Finally, Foskett’s work helped me to see more clearly that many interpreters (myself included) have imposed a one-sided framework for understanding Jew-Samaritan relations based on their reading of John 4. She notes correctly that upon deeper inspection there is also evidence for a general ambivalence between the two groups. To be sure, “Jews actually sometimes ‘dined with Samaritans, counted them among the quorum for saying grace, considered them valid witnesses in certain legal proceedings, and permitted them entry into the inner court of the Jerusalem temple’” (Foskett, citing Maccini).

David Arthur Sánchez begins with an interrogation of traditional criticism of the Bible that proposes a presumed dehumanized reader to purport neutral, scientific, and objectivized readings. Not surprisingly, then, the majority of biblical commentaries on John 4 have focused primarily on Jesus’s religious *conversion* of the Samaritan woman to emphasize an ecclesial and mission-dominant focus “with strong tinges of gender and

ethnocultural hierarchicalizations.” Moreover, the foregrounding of this missional triumphalism overshadows and diminishes other potential interpretive perspectives that focus on the gender and ethnocultural considerations. Foregrounding the Samaritan woman in the narrative, Sánchez views his role anew as “one who is used, chastised, violated and ultimately discarded by the narrative action for the sake of the triumphant gospel message and the superior living water of Jesus.” A Chicano optic understands clearly that John 4 is thus shaped narratively as “a mandate for aggressive and sexualized missionizing in an othered, feminized, and ethnically exotic land. Jesus (and the disciples) *penetrate* Samaria during his travels from Judea to the Galilee.” Thus, the subjectivity of a Chicano interrogation through the lens of *malinchismo* sees clear parallels between the Samaritan woman and Doña Maria/*la Malinche*. In both stories, a woman is represented as being the medium of regional penetration by a foreigner who has a superior religious and cultural knowledge. In the end, the Samaritan woman’s new role as a vessel of living water to the townspeople of Samaria is a temporary one. Now chastised by Jesus because of marital history and inferior religiocultural knowledge, she serves simply as a temporal intermediary “until the townspeople encounter the superior water vessel, Jesus.” Sánchez has helped to problematize my most cherished interpretive approach: a liberation reading lens. The harsh reality is that not every passage can be *forced/placed* into a liberative framework or reading, although it is certainly true that “the reasons for the sometimes-conflicting interpretative evaluations have to do with the contexts—historical-cultural, social-political, and religious-philosophical—of the interpreter.”

Finally, Mitzi J. Smith begins her engaging examination with the city of Detroit and its actions to cut off the water supply to residents who were unable to pay their bills in 2014. Reading this situation through the lens of John 4 (and vice versa) with a womanist sensitivity that privileges and values the lives and experiences of black women, she presents her thesis: it is not the Samaritan woman’s revelation that Jesus is the Messiah, but Jesus’s claims to “possess living water, which the Samaritan woman can possess merely by asking for it” that is the remarkable and revelatory moment in the narrative. The revelation in 2014 Detroit is that the privatization of water is a form of neocolonialism where private companies place profits and stockholder approval over the concern for the public good. On the contrary, it seems that in John 4 the water in Jacob’s well in Sychar is free and uncontested—Jesus is there, and so is the Samaritan woman with her dipping vessel to no one’s dismay. However, Smith suggests that



when Jesus makes his claim of access to free living water, “water *is* being contested within the framework of ethnic/racial and gender difference” (emphasis added). But the living water of which Jesus speaks is not that which is found in Jacob’s well? Is Jesus even referring to real water—H<sub>2</sub>O? Even more, is “Jesus’s offer to give the Samaritan woman living water just for the asking, free of charge, ... a subversive anticolonial gesture”? My initial impression was that this is a metaphor—Jesus is not talking about real water (H<sub>2</sub>O), which is apparently readily available to the woman and others in the community. The water Jesus offers the unnamed woman is not even contested by Rome. How hard should this metaphor be pressed? But perhaps the subversion is indeed in this offer of living water, as Smith suggests: “Jesus’s revelation that he possesses and has the power to give free living water to the Samaritan woman is a subversive and anticolonial act that transcends barriers of difference based on race, class, and gender—unjust barriers that human beings erect to deny other humans the right to live life abundantly.” Thus, it seems as if Smith has already anticipated my objection. “Living water,” she says, “functions as a unifying metaphor, *transcending its symbolism*—a metaphor of interdependence between two colonized peoples and freedom from total dependence on the Roman Empire as colonizer” (emphasis added). Smith has helped me to see more clearly what creative insight womanist vision can bring to interpretation when black women’s experiences are foregrounded in interpretation.

I appreciate this opportunity to read and respond to the work of my colleagues. I have found value in and learned from each of them. Unlike the blind man at Bethesda, who “saw everything clearly” after he had been healed, I can say that I see several things more clearly after having the opportunity to read these selections. Many thanks to the editors!

#### Work Cited

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## Revelation 18



## The Mother-Whore and Her Bling: A Womanist Maternal View of Revelation 17–18

Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder

With this girl then you better be paid  
You know why  
It take too much to touch her  
Now I ain't sayin' she a gold digger  
But she ain't messin' with no broke ...  
Get down girl go head get down  
Get down girl go head get down ...

—“Gold Digger,” Kanye West and Jamie Foxx

To begin an essay in biblical studies with a quote from a rapper, especially a sometimes controversial figure, may appear anathema. Whereas Jamie Foxx garners much acclaim, Kanye West's public image waxes and wanes. Yet their song “Gold Digger” elicits cultural parallels related to agency and the mother-whore of Rev 17–18. Referring to any biblical character as a gold digger may not bode well with ecclesial officials, although the writer of Revelation does not mince words calling this mother a whore. I realize I tread thin exegetical ice in correlating woman as mother with woman as gold digger. The dis-ease of feminists and womanists will surely find such connections problematic and offensive. I aver that John's labeling of the woman as a prostitute is more disturbing. The lack of attention to her role as a mother is ultimately unsettling.

John the author of Revelation sets his rhetorical treatise at the end of the first century and turn of the second century CE. Although he cryptically writes about the empire, his words are not directed to the empire. His task is to persuade and encourage the seven churches under his care. Christians in John's community faced difficulty and suffered at the hands of the new Nero or Domitian. This heir of the Flavian dynasty was the root

cause of the spiritual and political agitation believers in Jesus encountered. The writer, in true apocalyptic form, employs profound imagery, symbolism, and triumphal discourse to inspire his readers to hold on—for the one who was, who is, who will surely come, and come in victory. To attest to the ensuing glory, the writer subversively describes the defeat of imperial forces through the fall of the mother-whore of Babylon or Rome.

As a mother, how I read and interpret gets filtered through this element of my social identity. One does not engage in hermeneutics residing in a cultural or sociological vacuum. Real readers engage real texts at real times through the lens of their ontological reality. Within the framework of cultural studies there is no neutral reader or reading (Segovia 1995, 59). I pitch my tent on the portrayal of biblical mothers and on how these figures specifically speak to my maternal role. Furthermore, as an African American woman, the dynamics of race and gender are integral conversational partners with any said text. The connection with class and economic agency also comes to bear in my interpretive process. Womanist hermeneutics take into account this tripartite approach, thus providing an arena for flesh-and-blood female readers of African descent to hold readings to the light of racism, sexism, and classism. Such a view challenges oppressive forces that impede potential, survival, and a productive quality of life. I examine the mother-whore figure in Rev 17–18 through this bilateral foundation of cultural studies and specifically womanist thinking. She is a mother living in a Roman imperialistic, patriarchal system designed to limit her economic access and mobility.

I combine my approach to motherhood and womanism through the nomenclature of womanist maternal thinking (Crowder 2009, 159; 2016, 3–27). Thus matters related to sex, class, and race are conversant with motherhood. Mothers of African American ancestry not only have to travail the murky highways of sexist measures, class constructions, and racial roadblocks; we must also maneuver systemic blockades and speed bumps that devalue our familial status. A womanist maternal view underscores class status and its connection to African American mothers who work. This framework examines how work helps to define and is a determining factor in an African American mother's economic standing. Womanist maternal thinking undergirds work as a core component of the role of African American mothers. Therefore, this study will expound on the mother-whore as a working mother who does what she needs to do for her children.

This study proceeds in the following manner. I briefly review scholarship on the mother-whore to show primarily how African American biblical

scholars have addressed her presence through racial, gender, and class constructions. A presentation on womanism and subsequently womanist maternal thought serves as a window into the characterization of mother-whore of Rev 17–18. Next, I explain the manner in which the author of Revelation engages the language of motherhood. This ultimately influences his depiction of this whoring mom, her bling, and her blinged-out children. The progeny of the mother-whore reaps the material benefits of her maternal agency. The death of the mother-whore, or matricide, concludes this work. Although she takes great strides to provide security for her and her seed, the system of exploitation kills this working mother. Her gold-digging endeavors leave her bereft not only of gold, but ultimately of her life.

### Womanism: A Mother's Garden

In her work *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength*, Chanequa Walker-Barnes (2014, 8) defines womanist thinking as analyses of race, gender, and religion. She argues that the intersection of race, gender, and class creates a lethal stronghold for Black women. Black women's experiences cannot be solely explained by race or gender. Our joys and struggles are quantitatively and qualitatively different from those of black men, white women, and other women of color (8). The author, while examining the idea of the StrongBlackWoman, explains tenets of womanist thinking. This interpretive approach considers the role of race, gender, and class—among other ontological factors—in the lives of African American women. Womanist hermeneutics starts with an analysis of roles assigned to African American or African diasporan women by their families and the dominant culture, the persistent stereotypes about African American women, the combination of race with gender and class (my addition), and the recognition of diversity among women (Mitchem 2002, 23).

Delores Williams asserts that a womanist theology challenges all oppressive forces impeding Black women's struggle for survival and for the development of a positive, productive quality of life conducive to the freedom and well-being of the women and the family. As a means of differentiating itself from other approaches to feminist hermeneutics, womanist theology branches off in its own direction, introducing new issues and constructing new analytical categories needed to interpret simultaneously the experience of Black women and the Black community in the context of theology or God-talk (Williams 1993, 14). For example, since Bonnie Miller-McLemore's (2002) feminist maternal theology for the flourishing

of mothers and children does not address issues of race and class, I found womanist thinking a better location for this work at the present time.

Alice Walker coined the word *womanist*. She chose the term over *black feminist* because she deemed it more reflective of black women's culture, especially Southern culture (Walker 1997, 15). Walker employs color play to define womanist as different from feminist. She states:

Womanist—from womanish (opposite of girlish i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious). A black feminist or feminist of color. “You acting womanish,” i.e. like a woman ... usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one.... [A womanist is also] a woman who loves other women sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture ... and women's strength ... committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist.... Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness.... Loves herself. Regardless. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender. (Walker 1983, xi–xii)

Using this color analogy, Walker maintains that womanist is a deeper shade of feminist, just as purple is a deeper shade of lavender. She does not suggest that purple is better than lavender. I do not think this is where Walker lands. However, I think she posits that there are ways in which the experiences of African American women are not encapsulated in the word *feminist*. Thus, being the literary artist that she is, Walker presents a new word to speak to the urgent need to address the experiences of black women.

Although Alice Walker first introduced the term *womanist* in 1979, womanist thinking reaches as far back as the nineteenth century with foremothers such as Anna Julia Cooper, Maria Stewart, Virginia Broughton, and Ida B. Wells. These women in the nineteenth century challenged society's oppressive standards and actions related to gender and race. A second development in womanist thinking appeared during the 1950s and early 1960s in the civil rights movement. What was problematic for womanist thinking during this period was the manner in which African American women's issues took a backseat to overall racial progress. The hegemony focused more on getting ahead as a race versus highlighting the subjugation of African American women, despite the intense labor of Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, Dorothy Cotton, Septima Clark, and other key African American women during this time. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the

feminist movement in the United States was at its zenith. This was also the beginning of the third phase of womanism. Many women, primarily white middle- to upper-class women, heralded the clarion call of equality. However, in the midst of this social and political struggle, some African American women became disgruntled, because their issues of racial difference and class displacement became invisible. Additionally, opposing African American women maintained that feminism was too antimale and lacked expressions of communal wholeness.

Although taking a theological approach, Monica Coleman's analysis of the dilemma of feminism is apropos. In her book *Making a Way Out of Now Way*, she asserts: "Feminists theologians ... unwittingly spoke only of white women's experience, especially of middle-and upper-class white women. They did not include issues of race and economics in their critiques. Womanists for the most part assert feminist thinking operates in opposition to men and is anathema to the church" (Coleman 2008, 6). Coleman (2013, 10), expounding on various waves or developments within womanism, even pushes the ideological envelope by offering a salient internal critique, citing its failure to engage in interreligious dialogue and to speak publicly to political identity. For her, womanism in its current state must engage in advocacy and value work and thinkers both inside and outside African American religious scholarship (19).

Thus, one can see the ways in which African American women in certain arenas challenged or resisted feminism: (1) feminism lacked a class agenda, (2) feminism lacked a message of male and female in community, (3) feminism ignored racism, (4) feminist theology did not value religious experience, and (5) feminism ignored issues related to gender identity. For African American women dissenting with feminist agendas, Walker's womanism was the impetus to do a new thing. Although African American women (in theology) who adopted womanism as a mode of study and a way of living critiqued feminism for its distance from the church, Walker's original definition bears no explicitly theological or Christian meaning. Her proposal merely states that a womanist "loves the Spirit." She does not define "Spirit." Nonetheless, womanism became, and still is, a means by which African American women can be both African American and female and work for the liberation of all African Americans, especially the poor. According to Raquel St. Clair (2007, 56): "Walker's nomenclature furnished them [African American women] with the language and framework to be who they are and pursue liberation from sexist, racist, classist and heterosexual oppression."

My framework for examining the portrayal of the mother-whore in Rev 17–18 begins here. As an African American woman, I am curious about the author's language as it relates to gender, race, and class in narrating this character's story. In addition, this study explicates how the mother-whore speaks to me as a current-day mother interested in such factors. The intent is to further discern what is the present liberating message of the mother-whore.

### Womanist Maternal Thought

Using the aforementioned delineation of womanism as a hermeneutical foundation, I expand its metes and bounds and propose a womanist maternal method. This path particularly brings to the surface the voices of mothers within this racial, ethnic, spiritual, and sociological context, whether the mothers are biological or not. Womanist authors such as Teresa Fry Brown, Barbara Essex, and Renita Weems, to name a few, have addressed mother/motherhood. Thus, Brown (2000) talks at length of the importance of African American grandmothers, mothers, and othermothers in handing on spiritual values or moral wisdom across generations of African American families, churches, and communities through their use of biblical mandates, precepts, and examples. Similarly, Essex (1997) discusses the role of her grandmother and mother in her childhood and adult life. Last, Weems (2002) highlights her relationship with her mother and its impact on her own relationship with her daughter. None has done so, however, under the auspices of a womanist maternal thinking (Crowder 2009).

Womanist maternal thought addresses the specific racial context of African American women and the mothering challenges connected to it. It purports vicissitudes that are unique to mothers in this social context, and therefore it is not universal. Examining motherhood through the lens of African American women maintains that circumstances that would appear general in nature become compounded due to race factors. Just as issues of racial identification shroud the actions by and perceptions of African American people, so do such elements touch the existence of African American mothers. Akin to the manner in which society attempts to demean women's presence and constrict their opportunities, such efforts are more stacked against African American women. I maintain that African American mothers not only have to filter through sexist measures and racial impediments, but they must also find ways to navigate systemic sieges that devalue their familial status.



Thus, there is a triple barrier of hardship through which African American women who are mothers have to pummel. Furthermore, as corporate arenas and academic institutions erect monuments of career immobility for women and African Americans, the same obstacles present themselves to African American mothers, forced often to choose between career and family. Therefore, a womanist maternal thought is a tripronged approach to understanding the nature of what it means to be African American, an African American woman, and an African American woman who is also a mother. Womanist maternal thought desires to reveal the organic complexities of women who live, move, and have their being in this ontological, racial, sexual, and familial existence.

A final tenet of womanist maternal thought concerns work and labor in ways that underscore economic status and its connection to African American mothers. Not only does womanist maternal thinking scrutinize the intersection of race, family, and gender constructions related to African American mothers, but this interpretive method also holds class dynamics to the light. This framework examines how labor helps to define and is a determining factor in an African American mother's fiscal standing. Womanist maternal thinking undergirds work as a core component of the role of African American mothers. For the sake of clarity, womanist maternal thought defines work as activity bringing children wholeness and health. This work can occur in the home or outside its environs.

A womanist maternal approach to thinking, conversation, and action does not seek to elevate the experiences of African American mothers over against mothers situated in other racial spaces. It dares not to suggest that because a mother is not African American, she is excluded from this discussion or community. It does not argue that African American mothers face more quandaries than a Latina, white, or Jewish mother. One group's experiences are not superior or substandard to another. They are just different.

Nonetheless, this hermeneutical map avows that a mother who is African American has to live and act through a certain lens that mothers in other racial and ethnic groups do not, simply because society sees and labels her "African American." At the same time, a womanist maternal approach does not purport that all African American mothers have the same challenges or opportunities. Suggesting a one-size-fits-all for African American mothers makes us guilty of the social universality that seeks to collapse all humans into the same state of affairs.

There are indeed class distinctions among African American mothers that tailor the outcome of their lives. The reasons a number of African

American mothers work outside the home range from professional fulfillment, to identity outside the home, and/or to a sense of calling or vocation. In such instances there may be African American mothers whose financial stability does not necessitate having to work. On the contrary, African American mothers in dire monetary straits, struggling to ascertain the bare necessities of life, find themselves conscripted to work jobs not out of professional satisfaction but in order to satisfy basic human needs. The statistics vary on African American mothers who work because they want to vis-à-vis those who work because they have to do so. In this regard, silk-stocking working mothers must come to the defense of custodian working mothers, as all work is not equal in pay or respected as such. I affirm Coleman's (2013, 21) thinking that a current wave of womanist thought must also maintain a goal of justice, survival, freedom, liberation, and/or quality of life as well as engage Victor Anderson's (2006) grotesqueries of life.

Womanist maternal thinking offers an external critique of the systemic forces that make it difficult for African American mothers to achieve and sustain social, racial, political, and economic freedom. It disrobes and lays bare oppressive structures seeking to force such mothers to choose between making a living and making a home. Thus, classism is an element in this ideological lens. As an approach to redefining work as not only physical labor but also advocacy, womanist maternal thought stands on the shoulders of the aforementioned womanist foremothers, who stood in the gap for communities of women and their children not able to stand for themselves. As African American mothers must muddle through sexism, it is incumbent on womanist maternal thought to include this oppression in the conversation. Furthermore, this way of thinking does not shy away from addressing racism, as the challenges African American mothers encounter are more convoluted, because they are experienced through African American social identity.

Not only does womanist maternal thought call on the carpet external factors exacerbating the existence of African American mothers, but it also contests through internal exchange any lack of sister-motherly regard. In other words, this ideology conscripts African American mothers basking in comfortable fiscal means to attend to and champion the cause of their sister-mothers who must work or die. This lifting-as-we-climb fight provides a forum for community and accountability as embodied in the maternal epitome of *ubuntu*—I am because we are. I am only a better African American mother as you are.

My reading of the mother-whore of Rev 17–18 is framed by womanist maternal thinking. For me she is a working mother. Her marginalized class status as a whore is even more profound, insofar as she uses harlotry to work within a paternalistic, patriarchal system, trading with all who seek to work her.

### I Remember Momma

African American scholars have broached Revelation using varying paths. Some have addressed the whore of Babylon; many have not. Herein lies the first distinction. I refer to this figure as the “mother-whore,” where for others she is the whore of Babylon. The paths to interpreting her are numerous and originate from a plethora of people and places. This section focuses principally on African American interpretations of this character as they address the intricacies of race, gender, and class (in some cases) in the biblical text. This is not to say that readings from other racial and ethnic groups do not ponder these dynamics. However, as a scholar within this arm of cultural interpretation, I am interested in how persons from my social location disrobe distinctions when wrestling with the same passage.

Thomas Slater’s response to Revelation in general focuses on the Christology of the slain Lamb. The Lamb in Rev 5 serves to strengthen John’s audience and encourage civil disobedience. This spiritual militancy paves the way for the defeat of the community’s foes. Through witnessing and even suffering, John’s hearers become nonconformists. Slater (2009, 59) paints this resisting picture in order to connect the model Lamb and its followers with the civil disobedience of Martin Luther King Jr. and others during the civil rights movement. Slater does not note the whore of Babylon or the mother-whore of Rev 17–18.

While she does not address the mother-whore, Clarice Martin notes John’s critique of slavery in the Roman Empire. Through a womanist reading, she enlarges our understanding of John’s indictment against Rome for its ethical-political commitments to slavery (Martin 2005). Martin offers a reading of Rev 18 within the context of understanding African American slavery. As a womanist portrayal, this exploration covers class and race dynamics through a female lens. She argues that Black women see their historical experiences of subjectivity reflected back at them (Martin 2005, 106). However, Martin does not specifically expound on the whore of Babylon or the mother-whore figure.

Allen Callahan's initial work on Revelation offers commentary on subversive language in this letter. John writes not to persuade the masters of rhetoric, but to offer a personal appeal to members of his community who are at risk of selling their birthright for emoluments of material prosperity (Callahan 1995, 456). In a later work, Callahan (2009) parallels the Babylonian exploitation in Rev 17–18 with economic rape (my word) among governments today. He proffers a boycott of such structures. To him the mother-whore is a promiscuous figure who seduces, not coerces. Thus, the focus is on her sexual prowess, not social or economic agency.

Brian Blount has the most extensive compilation on Revelation. From various articles to books and commentary, his analysis of the literature through the lens of African American ethics and culture lends itself to academic and ecclesial settings (Blount 2005; 2009; cf. Blount 2001; Blount et al. 2007). His work posits the mother-whore as the first referent of the word *whore*. Notably, Blount does not use the expression "mother whore." While discussing the sexual impurity and immorality associated with this figure, Blount maintains that as a mother she has co-opted children or other cities into her military, economic, and political complex. Blount (2009, 316) alludes to a degree of power that the mother-whore is able to exert in that she coerces others to join her activities. His is the only view that gives her some ownership and prowess within a domineering system.

Although none of the aforementioned scholars engage in womanist maternal thought and in some cases do not address specifically or engage the label "mother-whore," there is much value in their work. I take fragments from Martin, Callahan, and Blount in my own pursuit. Martin provides a similar approach in that womanist ways of addressing struggle, oppression, and liberation are at the root of hermeneutical engagement. No, Martin does not offer any discourse on the mother-whore, but she helps by affirming a system of political marginalization present in John's apocalyptic context. Callahan's study on subversive language aids in reading Revelation and the author's account as a coded word to an inside group of people. This idea of cryptic messaging is pervasive in first-century Roman literature (Crowder 2002, 77). In my view, John as a writer is a product of this literary context. Revelation is a tool for the masses, not the master. The mother-whore is not in charge, but she learns to take charge even within a limited system. She learns how to supplant the master's house. Blount is the only one who comes close to giving the mother-whore some degree of agency. She conscripts other cities to participate in her political whoredom wherein her children benefit. Yet, this is the extent of Blount's discourse on

this mother and her children. I aver that what the mother-whore does for herself and her children in light of the circumstances deserves much more dialogue and investigation.

### A Mother-Whore Is Still a Mother

The author of Revelation uses the Greek word *μήτηρ*, or “mother,” to describe the mother-whore in chapter 17. This is John’s only use of the word in the entire letter. The reader must note that she is described as a mother who gives birth to prostitutes. Yes, the figure in Rev 17:1 is a whore, but she is also a mom (17:5). Because the writer only uses this maternal designation once, it is worth noting.

Although this is first designation of a woman as mother in Revelation, it is not the first time John mentions a woman giving birth. In chapter 12, the woman clothed with sun and the moon under her feet is pregnant. Thus, she is also a mother. I refer to her as the sun-mother. Her portrayal and fate, however, are much different from those of the mother-whore. In many ways, these two figures are literary foils whose existences are antithetical to each other.

First, the sun-mother in chapter 12 wears the sun and the moon. The mother-whore is arrayed in gold, precious stones, pearls, purple, and scarlet (17:4). The reader is to associate one with nature and creation, and the other with materialism and worldly gain. Second, the sun-mother is adorned with a crown of twelve stars, over against the mother-whore, who wears a kind of crown on her forehead that exclaims: Babylon, Mother of Whores (17:5). Thus, the mother-whore has a name, contrary to the nameless state of the sun-mother. Third, the sun-mother is not drunk, nor does she give birth to prostitutes, unlike the mother-whore. Instead, the sun-mother gives birth to a male child who is to rule all nations (12:5). God rescues the seed of the sun-mother (12:6), while the progeny of the mother-whore are polluted and responsible for royal and global immorality (18:3). Last, God saves the sun-mother (12:6), but the mother-whore will meet her deadly fate (18:18–19).

The mother-whore has living children. Yes, the children have the mother’s prostituting DNA, but the reader cannot discount the author’s designations of “mother” and “children.” There is a biological connection between this mom and her seed. She is their caretaker and provider. She is to do whatever is in their best interest. As a mother, she is responsible for their well-being. She chooses to abuse her body and subject herself to

the sexual whims and fantasies of many clients. In this case, the mother-whore must yield to the perversion of a scarlet beast and manage its seven heads and ten horns that battle for her womb. Yet, a mother does what a mother does for her children. The children of the mother-whore mirror her maternal makeup. They have learned the art of trading one's goods for goods. They know what it means to detach themselves from their work. As whores themselves, these girl-children model ladyhood through lying on their backs or in other lasciviousness-laden poses. They take pleasure or fake pleasure for the sake of pleasing others.

Motherhood in John's first-century context was precarious. Girls married in their early teenage years, with pregnancy soon thereafter. Age and lack of physical development made childbirth risky at best. At least a quarter of the babies born did not survive, and half died before the age of ten. To exacerbate matters, the father of the household, or the *paterfamilias*, could decide whether the newborn would be accepted into the family. Momma had the right to birth the child. Daddy had the right to abandon it.

Thus, the mother-whore of Rev 17–18 exists in a context where early in life she would have learned that her body was not her own. Also, men would have made it clear that her children were not highly valued. Thus, her praxis of prostitution is just a way of applying a lesson learned. Her body is a means of showing love for her children and letting them live. More succinctly, her children are prized possessions to her, if no one else. Because their sheer existence is tenuous, she understands the urgency of ensuring their survival. This working mother-whore works it for her babies.

She has to work it because there is no mention of a father to these whoring boys and abominable girls in Rev 17:5. John does not reveal who provided the sperm that aided in the mother-whore's conception. She is not a widow (18:7). She is a mother. The author of the Apocalypse does not state whether this mother is married. If the metaphor is to carry, then the reader must surmise that the children are the product of the mother's sexual liaisons. As kings weep and wail for her (18:9), as merchants weep and mourn for her (18:11, 15) and shipmasters and seafarers throw dust on their heads and cry out (18:19), John the Revelator hints at their complicity in the mother-whore's wayward ways, for such profuse displays of emotion are reserved for the object of one's affection. No casual connection elicits this degree of response. Therefore, it is likely that these are the fathers of the children of whoredom and the seed of abomination. Their chromosomes of conquest and sperm of exploitation are responsible for creating the empire that is "Babylon"/Rome. Just as the mother-whore has

to control the beast on which she rides (17:3), she also has to manage other suitors who desire her and aspire to enter her. No doubt these are also the mother-whore's "babies' daddies."

The writer subversively double-codes the mother-whore with the name Babylon, or more contextually, Rome. Thus, in this maternal empire, the imperial children represent boy-towns and girl-cities emanating from the mother-whore's political, economic, social, cultural, and religious loins. As an imperial structure, Babylon or Rome has innumerable progeny throughout the land. There are many under her care. She has conquered many lands and people. She is a queen and says so herself (18:7). A plethora of nations must pay homage and bid obeisance. Many have entered, literally and figuratively, this mother-whore. Thus, the author of Revelation alludes to her vastness and power. She is not a mere victim; rather, as a matriarch her sights are on her seed and their welfare. She may be a whore, but she knows how to provide for those who need her most, her children.

My intent in this exercise is not to advocate prostitution. I am not inferring that mothers, or any woman for that matter, subject themselves to any degree of physical, spiritual, academic, or emotional whoring. What I asseverate is that mothers go to extreme and sometimes unseemly measures for their children. The mother-whore is a mother with a vested relationship with her children. As a working mother, her job is a means of providing for her family, like it or not. A womanist maternal hermeneutic scrutinizes the role of work among African American mothers and the type and degree of such employment. Such an inquiry seeks to expound on the efforts African American mothers take to hold families together. One never comprehends another's action until one walks in another's shoes or works where she works.

Revelation 17–18 does not stop at its portrayal of the mother-whore as having a degree of power. Her prostituting ways not only put food on her children's table but also prove quite a lucrative endeavor. So much so, in fact, that neither the mother-whore nor her abominating sons or whoring daughters look too shabby. Business is good. All partake in the material gain from Mom's sexual escapades. "I ain' sayin' she's a gold digger, but she ain't messin with no broke."

### Of Maternal and the Material

The description of the mother-whore is that of wealth and worth. She is clothed in purple and scarlet, indicating royalty. On her body are gold,



jewels, and pearls. She even imbibes impurities and abominations from a golden cup (17:4). This woman is upper class. She is a mother-whore of means. The business of the body has been good to her. Her children have also benefited from the mother-whore's corporate escapades. Chapter 18 notes that all nations have drunk of her wine (18:3). As an imperial personality, this queen (18:7) has helped to spread the motherly wealth. Moreover, figures in her same social stratus—namely, kings—have also gained through trading with her. Such royal personas lived in luxury with this queen-mother-whore (18:9).

John depicts the mother-whore as a promiscuous character, but she is also a prosperous CEO. She has bedroom and business savvy. Merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxury (18:3). They weep because at her demise so goes their material gain. Gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, silk, scarlet, cinnamon, spice, myrrh, cattle, sheep, horses, and even slaves are a just a few of the potential losses not if, but when, the mother-whore meets her death (18:11). The seafarers, shipmasters, and kings, all partners of the CEO-queen-mother-whore, see their physical and fiscal stock about to plummet. They are in fear of her torment and cry aloud (18:15). Their economic complicity has seen its last days.

The reaction of her venture partners to her fate stands in stark contrast to that of the mother-whore. They are in shock and appalled by what is to come. She shows much effrontery and gall. With stentorian command, she voices that she will never see grief (18:7). In true queenly fashion, she presents herself as invincible. The empire has gone to the mother-whore's head.

Based on the above analysis, I see the mother-whore as a mother of agency. She is able to barter and trade in a patriarchal society. She goes against the gender grain. She is not a mother with merely a little meal and oil for her children. She has raw materials, luxury goods, animal and even human chattel at her disposal. She is a queen. She is royal. Whereas John puts much emphasis on kingdoms and kings, one cannot overlook this regal prostitute wearing purple. She is not a slave, but she negotiates slavery.

I concede that even as a prostitute the mother-whore risks wallowing in the cesspool of the lower class of her day. Yes, as a whore she surrenders part of her being and all of her body to male domination. So, an upper-class whore is nonetheless a whore. I get it. However, navigating systems and negotiating paternalistic power dynamics are not characteristics of victimization. These are the moves of the economically and socially savvy.

Work as alienated labor can be economically exploitative, physically demanding, and intellectually deadening—namely, the type of work long



associated with African American women's status as "mule" (Hurstons 2000, 17). Yet, work can also be empowering and creative, even if it is physically challenging and appears to be underclass. One cannot forget the triple consciousness of family, work, and community exemplified by club-women such as Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell. As African American women and African American mothers, they did not relinquish their public duty. Wells "nursed her two sons, taking them on trains on the way to her lectures" (Parker 2005, 33). These mothers did the work they had to do and worked the system accordingly.

The mother-whore is a harlot, and she is an imperial, corporate mogul. She works for her children and earns much. She aligns with a paternalistic, patriarchal, marginalizing political and economic system for quality of life. In the end the system kills her.

### Matricide

The mother-whore dies. She becomes too big for her prostituting britches. A strong-willed, self-sufficient, assertive woman is a dangerous thing. The writer of Revelation purports this. Had she just been a mother, her fate might have been akin to that of the sun-mother. Her story rests on a loud silence. She has the privilege of dwelling in the wilderness for over a millennium (12:6). On the contrary, the mother-whore does not just die; hers is a violent, horrific demise. Like a stone thrown into the sea, so is ensuing her death (18:21). There is no need to search for her remains, as they are not to be found. The annals of time will erase her existence from the face of the earth. All of the imperial accoutrements of laughter, folly, music, marriages, and trade cease, as does the breath in her body. For Momma to die of natural causes is heart-wrenching. To kill a mother, even if she is a mother-whore, is almost inhumane.

Only the second mother in Revelation, and the mother-whore dies in a heinous manner. Patriarchal, paternalistic empires abuse women in life and in death. The Bible is not replete with anyone killing a mother. Yes, mothers and daughters will turn against each other (Mic 7:6; Matt 10:35; Luke 12:53). There is no overt story of matricide. The exception is if the mother is powerful, uses the system that seeks to use her, amasses material gain from her work, and dares to show a modicum of self-esteem and self-worth. This is the narrative of the mother-whore.

Present economic, cultural, and racial systems have a way of killing mothers, especially African American mothers. Diamond Sharp

discusses the arrests and challenges black mothers experienced as they were trying to work. The mothers are not prostitutes, but they faced legal dilemmas and public vitriol because of the choices they made while trying to be faithful to their jobs and balance childcare and family security (Sharp 2014). When mothers in this racial group have to ponder leaving a child in a vehicle or going on a job interview, this is death at the hands of an imperial system. A mother's desperate plea on Craigslist for housing for her and her children speaks to the evils of an economic structure. Clocking in at a fast-food restaurant while her daughter plays in a nearby playground due to lack of childcare is an indictment not on the mother but on inadequate and insufficient wages. Academic institutions that force female professors to choose carefully or rethink decisions to have children or that make it difficult to be a scholar-mother are just as complicit. These are just a few ways in which our current society commits matricide. At least the mother-whore dies a quick death. Current economic, political, racial, and social mechanisms relish in a slow human disintegration.

### Conclusion

Womanist maternal thinking as a new discourse in cultural studies seeks to explore how race, class, and gender are reflected through African American mothers. This framework furthers explicates the work of such mothers and defines this work as advocacy for children's sake. Womanist maternal thought does not show preference for the status of mothers who work at home over mothers who work outside the house. A mother is a mother, and a working mother is a working mother, regardless of the time, place, or setting.

This examination of the mother-whore argues that one cannot discard John's labeling of the harlot in Rev 17–18 as a mother. Although the letter subversively encourages the believers to endure, there are aspects of the author's rhetoric that are not so cryptic. His narrative absence of any other mother reference is resounding. The mother-whore's status as a mother situates her as a woman with connections to those under her care. Although the children bear the mother's sexual dysfunction, they are family. As children in the first century faced a perilous existence if they survived at all, I aver that the mother-whore dared to do whatever she needed in order to preclude her seed's demise. Her fornication and lascivious activity benefited her and her household.

The author of Revelation makes it clear that the remuneration from the mother-whore's prostituting was not minimal. There was much gain. She accumulated much bling. Not only do the raw goods, precious materials, and human cargo she exchanged for and with her body speak to the class status of the mother-whore, but these products speak to her business acumen. They also mirror the wealth of her imperial reign. Kings, merchants, seafarers enjoyed her physical and corporeal goods as they exported and imported such items and themselves into her "empire." Such was the depth of their partnership with the mother-whore that they mourned profusely at the thought of her demise. "I ain't sayin' she's a gold digger, but this mother-whore wasn't messin' with no broke."

The mother-whore worked the system and acquired extensive bling due to her ability to negotiate and live in a man's world. However, like our current world, a StrongBlackWoman does not sit too well. Whereas a current-day system may not throw African American mothers into the sea as portrayed in Rev 18, it will drown us in debt, despair, and depression. As womanist maternal thought seeks to address not only struggle and oppression but also liberation, I end with Maria Stewart (1987, 64): "It appears to me that American has become the great city of Babylon, for she has boasted in her heart, I sit as a queen and am not a widow, and I shall see no sorrow." What makes this quote liberating? You shall know the truth, and the truth, she make you free. This is my truth about the mother-whore in Rev 17–18.

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## Self-Deporting from Babylon? A Latinx Borderlands Reading of Revelation 18:4

Roberto Mata

Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,  
“Come out of her, my people,  
So that you do not take part in her sins,  
And so that you do not share in her plagues.”

—Revelation 18:4

This essay reads the call to exit Babylon in Rev 18:4 through a Latinx borderlands perspective. Using Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of borderlands and the current struggle of undocumented Latinxs against attrition-through-enforcement policies, I read Rev 18:4 as a counterproductive call for the self-deportation of the inscribed audience from the socio-economic and political structures of the Roman Empire. After mapping the geopolitical forces grating violently against each other and the borderlands situations they create, as well the ways in which borderlands subjects negotiate those spaces, I explore the rhetorical strategies that John deploys to persuade his audience to self-deport. In a manner evocative of the GOP’s attrition-through-enforcement policies, he attempts to convince his audience by denying “undocumented” believers a place in the Lamb’s green-card registry or book of life and citizenship in the new Jerusalem, as well as access to the health and wealth it signifies. Should they refuse, these believers will face not only poverty but also sickness and potentially death! In short, John seeks to make his Others so miserable that they, or their followers, will have no choice but to self-deport from Babylon.

## Introduction

### Attrition through Enforcement

In 2013, three undocumented Latinx students—Lizbeth Mateo, Lulu Martinez, and Marco Saavedra—self-deported to Mexico as a way to protest the lack of immigration reform and the implementation of attrition-through-enforcement strategies. These strategies embody the idea that undocumented immigrants will self-deport when state and federal governments close any access to health care, social services, education, and a path to citizenship. A few days after their self-deportation, the students prepared to cross back into the United States, while faith-based advocacy groups prayed that God would open the border gates for them, just as God had opened the Red Sea. Although the ensuing theological reflection of these advocacy groups illuminates the ways in which Latinx communities appropriate the Bible in their struggles for justice, it also raises questions about uncritically embracing texts whose rhetoric may also reinforce the systemic oppression that Latinxs are seeking to overcome. The book of Revelation is a case in point. Although it has inspired justice movements in the Global North and the Global South, its rhetoric may also marginalize, silence, and even exclude unwanted “others.”

### Revelation's Rhetoric of Self-Exclusion

Indeed, the book of Revelation calls believers to exclude themselves from the socioeconomic and political structures of the Roman Empire. Nowhere is this call more evident than in Rev 18:4, where a divine voice summons the people of God to exit the imperial matrix: “Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, so that you do not take part in her sins, and so that you do not share in her plagues.’” This rhetoric of self-exclusion has captured the imagination of scholars from the Global South and the Global North. While some readings from the Global North cast the call as a figurative and spiritual withdrawal from “vanity fair” (Mounce 1998, 237), others in the Global South view it as a literal socioeconomic and political withdrawal (Richard 1995, 135).

Although these approaches have their merits, they at times reinforce the binaries liberation/oppression, figurative/literal, and collusion/resistance. Furthermore, they uncritically embrace John's silencing of dissident voices within the text and unwittingly reinforce his rhetoric of exclu-



sion. At a time when GOP politicians and state governments have called for the self-deportation of millions of undocumented immigrants, those interpretations could promote the socioeconomic and political disenfranchisement of undocumented Latinx communities in the US borderlands. Reading from this Latinx borderlands context, then, calls for a reevaluation of Rev 18:4, its exclusionary rhetoric, and its interpretations in both the Global North and the Global South.

### Self-Exclusion as Self-Deportation

To problematize Revelation's rhetoric of self-exclusion, I draw from the contemporary geopolitical situation of undocumented Latinx immigrants and Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of borderlands as an open wound (*herida abierta*) or third cultural space that emerges from the grating between the first and the third world (Anzaldúa 1999, 25). Through this framework, I then propose that (1) both the empire of the beast and that of the Lamb constitute two major geopolitical powers grating against one another. Furthermore, I posit that (2) this bloody grating has created a borderlands situation that has turned the dissident voices of the text into *Atravesados*, who must now (3) negotiate that geopolitical situation. Ultimately, my borderlands interpretation of Rev 18:4 reads its call to exit Babylon as a call for the self-deportation of dissident believers.

In my view, John attempts to persuade all believers to self-deport from Babylon through an approach not so dissimilar from enforcement-through-attribution legislations. Like GOP politicians, John construes a rhetorical situation where Babylon's associates are unable to access heavenly foods (2:7; 17; 22:2), citizenship in the new Jerusalem (3:12), and protection against a "second death" (2:11). Unlike them, however, John claims to be on the side of the oppressed and even makes reference to his self-deportation at Patmos (1:9). Through this borderlands reading, I not only problematize the author's rhetoric of self-exclusion but also illumine the ways in which John's others negotiated the complex borderlands between marginalization and privilege, between citizenship and illegality, and between survival and attrition.

### Reading from the Global North and the Global South

Scholars and theologians from both the Global North and the Global South have drawn from Rev 18 and its critique of empire. While one might

be tempted to cast readings from the Global North as being primarily concerned with the spiritual dimensions of the divine summons in Rev 18:4, and readings from the Global South as primarily concerned with liberation or resistance, readings from these two geopolitical locations evidence varied interpretations.

Whereas some readings from the Global North often view Rev 18:4 as a separation of “the righteous from the wicked” (Mounce 1998, 327) or as a divorce from an evil city and its temptations (Roloff 1993, 205), others view it as a refusal “to participate in the economic juggernaut that Rome has established” (Blount 2009, 328). Indeed, the Global North has its share of scholars who use liberation or contextual approaches to biblical interpretation. Writing from within the power center, Harry Maier interprets the command in Rev 18:4 in terms of resistance. In his view, the divine summons constitutes “a call to immigration and the taking up of an ironically charged apocalyptic hybridity of exile utilizing a subversive doubling against the dominant; a form of replaying empire so as to revise it” (Maier 2005, 77).

Readings from the Global South, particularly from Latin America, view the call to exit Babylon as a concrete way of resisting empire. Pablo Richard, for instance, suggests that the divine summons is not merely spiritual but also involves economic, social, political resistance. In his view, “the idea is to resist, to refuse to participate, to create alternatives” (Richard 1995, 135). Likewise, Allen Callahan (1999, 65) observes, “To trade in the luxury that only the injustice of empire makes possible is to become a partaker of the guilt to be found a companion in the crime.” Nevertheless, other scholars, such as Ricardo Foulkes (1989, 16), have underscored the pastoral and spiritual dimensions of the call to come out, which Foulkes sees as driven by pastoral concerns and as religious and figurative types of coming out from the corrupt city.

### Implications for Borderlands Subjects

Despite the diversity of readings in both geopolitical spaces, the interpretations above remain problematic for a borderlands audience and do so on several grounds. First, the perspectives underscoring the spiritual dimensions of the divine command often play into the otherworldly ethos of certain religious movements that embrace the idea of the rapture, that is, the idea that Jesus will return and “snatch Christians off the earth” in the last days (Rossing 2004, 21). Second, even if one were to take the liberation-

oriented readings from the Global South or a small minority in the Global North, the Latinx borderlands readers would still be called to disengage from the socioeconomic and political structures that they inhabit, albeit this time on grounds of resistance.

Third, the application of the readings above to a borderlands context not only unveils the legally stable positions of its authors but also reinforces the calls for self-deportation of immigrants issued by GOP politicians, including President Donald Trump. Finally, readings from the Global North and the Global South uncritically embrace the antilanguage or imperial rhetoric of Revelation. In doing so, they unwittingly reinforce John's vilification of the inscribed others within the seven *ἐκκλησίαι* (Schüssler Fiorenza 2007, 143). These include believers who embrace the teaching of Balaam in Pergamum (2:12–17) and Jezebel at Thyatira (2:18–29). Given the current calls for the self-deportation of Latinx immigrants and the ideologies that support it, we must consider the ethical implications of Rev 18:4 for a community that already experiences socioeconomic and political disfranchisement.

### Reading from a Borderlands Context

#### The Genesis of Attrition through Enforcement

As an exercise in contextual biblical interpretation, this paper reads Rev 18 from the contemporary situation of the Latinx community and their struggles against attrition-through-enforcement policies. According to Mark Krikorian (2005, 3), a member of the Center for Immigration Studies, attrition through enforcement is a strategy for the effective reduction of illegal immigration through the application of current and new immigration laws. At its core, the theory presupposes that if state and federal officials deny undocumented immigrants access to health services, education, housing, and driver's licenses, they will ultimately self-deport to their respective countries of origin.

Echoing Krikorian's notion of attrition through enforcement, GOP presidential candidates in 2016, from Mitt Romney to Donald Trump, proposed self-deportation as a viable alternative to "rounding up illegal immigrants" and sending them home. Trump promoted this policy along with his plan to create a border wall to stop Mexican immigrants, whom he derided as criminals, rapists, and drug dealers. Prior to the 2016 campaign and election, Governor Pete Wilson of California had driven his

reelection campaign on Proposition 187, which became the blueprint for attrition-through-enforcement strategies. This 1994 ballot initiative, also known as Save Our State, not only called for a statewide citizenship screening process but also sought to deny illegal and legal immigrants access to free health care, social services, and education (Schuck 1994, 990). Although the initiative won a decisive victory, with 95 percent of the vote, the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional. Seeking to explain the landslide victory of Proposition 187, certain scholars propose a correlation between California's deep economic recession in the 1990s and the sharp resurgence of nativism (Alvarez and Butterfield 2000, 170). Since Proposition 187, other states have sought to implement similar measures.

In states such as Arizona, Georgia, and Alabama, among others, GOP politicians have promoted attrition-through-enforcement legislation. Arizona's Senate Bill 1070 has become rather popular among the proponents of attrition through enforcement. This legislation authorized law enforcement officials to detain anyone who appeared to be an "illegal alien" and penalized anyone hiring, sheltering, or transporting undocumented workers (Eagly 2011, 1767). Under the guise of state law, Senate Bill 1070 essentially allows for racial profiling without any control. Hence, as Andrea Christian Nill (2011, 36) observes, "SB 1070 subtly situates civil immigration laws over civil rights in the name of solving the problem." In her view, Senate Bill 1070 endangers the standing of all Latinx "law-abiding citizens." Anyone with a Hispanic phenotype is subject to questioning by the police.

Other propositions exposing the Latinxs to poverty, illiteracy, and racial profiling include Georgia's House Bill 87 and Alabama's House Bill 56. Whereas the former bans Latinx immigrants from gathering in public spaces to seek work and penalizes those who employ them, the latter bans undocumented Latinx children from public schools. Also, it punishes churches and other nonprofit organizations that seek to protect those students. By closing every door to education, employment, and social services, attrition-through-enforcement laws are forcing Latinxs to either leave the United States or to remain in a state of utter marginalization in their respective communities. I read Rev 18:4 from this location and do so in conjunction with Anzaldúa's notion of borderlands.

### Borderlands Theory

In her work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa articulates a critical theoretical framework for both resistance and negotia-

tion based on her social reality as a Chicana living in the United States borderlands. Deportations and institutional racism are not unfamiliar to her work but rather inform her theoretical reflections. This reading of Rev 18:4 draws from Anzaldúa's notion of border, borderlands, and *Los Atravesados*.

For Anzaldúa, a border is not only as a dividing line that serves to delineate safe and unsafe spaces or distinguishes us versus them. Rather, it is "a vague and undetermined space created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (Anzaldúa 1999, 3). Reflecting not only on the fixity and fluidity of the United States–Mexico border but also on the imperial violence that created it, Anzaldúa proceeds to define a borderland as *una herida abierta* ("an open wound"). The borderland is a place where "the Third World grates against the First and bleeds" (3). In her view, the blood resulting from that violence creates a third culture, a borderlands culture. Despite its vagueness, or perhaps because of it, *Los Atravesados* inhabit the borderlands. For the white dominant population, they are the "squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, and the half dead: in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the normal" (25). Most important, Anzaldúa also intimates that those in power paint such a portrait to justify the marginalization of the borderlands other. In the words of Albert Memmi (1965, 82), they paint "portraits of wretchedness" that caricature the other as sick, lazy, and ignorant. In turn, these portraits enable dominant groups to justify their presence, domination, and exploitation of the other.

Rooted in the struggles of undocumented Latinxs and Anzaldúa's borderlands theory, this reading of Rev 18:4 is attentive to the geopolitical forces at work in Revelation. Considering that the eschatological grating between God's empire and the empire of the beast is set to be a bloody one (19:11–21), it is also important to explore the borderlands situations it creates. While it is true that the new Jerusalem rises only after Babylon's demise, John calls believers to live as if the upcoming power shift were already a reality on earth. In the meantime, the tension between the two empires, their imperial cities, and their respective followers can be seen in the exigencies that characterize the messages to the seven assemblies (1:9–3:21). Thus, if one is to grasp the impact of the geopolitical grating between the empires mentioned above, and the ways in which the inscribed audience negotiated those borderlands situations, one must first map the rhetorical function of Rev 18:4 within the overall rhetorical situation of Revelation.

## The Rhetorical Function of Revelation 18:4

### The Trial of Babylon

The coming judgment of Rome triggers the call to exit the imperial matrix in Rev 18:4. In a climactic tone, a divine voice announces the fall of Babylon and its associates (18:2–19). As Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1991, 95) observes, the passage is part of a larger threefold literary structure that includes (1) the power of Babylon (17:1–19:10), (2) its trial and judgment (18:1–24), and (3) a heavenly liturgy celebrating God's judgment and marriage feast of the Lamb (19:1–17). In this essay, I focus primarily on the second part but integrate parts 1 and 2 where appropriate.

Within this literary context, the judgment of Babylon appears as a type of "universal courtroom in which a class action suit takes place" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991, 99). While Christians and all those murdered on earth (Rev 18:24) constitute the plaintiffs who have filed the suit, Babylon is the defendant who faces murder charges "in the service of power and idolatry" (99). The author depicts this misuse of authority as an immoral relationship with the nations and kings of the earth, and one that has enabled the merchants of the earth to benefit handsomely from this relationship (Rev 18:3). Hence, idolatry and fornication must also be understood in economic and political terms. The inscribed author alludes to the wealth of the merchants and their close association with Babylon through the cargo items they transport to the imperial capital. The contents of the cargo range from spices to beasts of burden, and from precious metals to slaves (18:11–13).

In keeping with the trial setting, God appears as the presiding judge. God condemns Babylon and answers the calls for vengeance issued earlier by the souls under the altar: "they cried out with a loud voice, 'Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?'" (6:10–11). In the wake of Babylon's demise, prophets and saints are exhorted to rejoice (18:20). What would be the purpose of the call to exit Babylon within the overall rhetorical situation of Revelation?

### The Rhetorical Situation of Revelation

The rhetorical situation of Revelation refers to the central problem or exigency for which John's message constitutes an appropriate response. As

Schüssler Fiorenza (1985, 192) observes, the key issue shapes the type of discourse deployed and change to be expected. The rhetorical situation of Revelation and the exigencies that elicited it emerge in the so-called messages to the seven assemblies (1:9–3:21). From the outset, Jesus commands John to deliver a message: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven assemblies: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea” (1:11). The resurrected Jesus reveals the exigencies of these assemblies.

Ephesus has lost its first love but receives praise for rejecting the teaching of the Nicolaitans (2:1–7). Smyrna is suffering the blasphemy and apparent opposition of the so-called synagogue of Satan and receives nothing but praise. Although Pergamum has remained faithful, some members embrace the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans—which seems to include consumption of food offered to idols and fornication—and thus receives a threatening exhortation (2:12–17). Moreover, Thyatira also receives a harsh reprimand for allowing a prophetess, whom the author derides as Jezebel, to promote *εἰδωλόθυστα* (food sacrificed to idols) and *πορνεία* (fornication) in 2:18–29. Although Sardis has a reputation of being alive, Jesus undermines it by noting it is dead (3:1–6). Along with Smyrna, Philadelphia receives nothing but praise for enduring the “blasphemy” of the so-called synagogue of Satan (3:7–13). Finally, Laodicea seems to boast on its wealth, but Jesus notes it is a lukewarm, wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked assembly (3:14–21).

From this list, the main exigency seems to be the presence of teachers and prophets who are promoting *εἰδωλόθυστα* and *πορνεία*. Hence, Robert Royalty (1998, 27) sees the issues as representative of a major power struggle between John and the false teachers. According to Paul Duff (2001, 65), John’s Others disagreed over how Christians should live in relation to pagan society. Whereas Jezebel and her associates do not see any conflict with participating in pagan structures, John makes *εἰδωλόθυστα* and *πορνεία* key boundaries for defining the community’s identity as people of God.

### The Rhetorical Function of Revelation 18:4

The rhetorical situation of Revelation reveals the function of 18:4 within the broader argument of the text. In my view, the divine summons to exit Babylon (1) reinforces John’s denunciation of false prophets/teachers in the assemblies and (2) sets his self-removal from pagan society as an example of faithful witness. The teachings of Jezebel, Balaam, and the



Nicolaitans, which John casts as εἰδωλόθυτα and πορνεία, enable dissident believers to engage fully in the socioeconomic and political activity of imperial structures.

Thus, the Laodiceans boast of wealth and prosperity, while those who apparently reject the teaching above are enduring poverty. However, the demise of Babylon in Rev 18 and the misfortune of its associates anticipate the ills to befall those who “fornicate,” or trade, with the imperial city. Like the merchants, the Laodiceans and other compromising believers are set to face economic ruin. Indeed, the fall of Babylon and the subsequent rise of the new Jerusalem signal a reversal of fortunes. Thus, Jesus tells the wealthy Laodiceans that they are in fact poor, wretched, and naked, whereas the impecunious people of Smyrna are wealthy: “I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich” (Rev 2:9).

The link John makes between his opponents, Babylon, and Satan further reinforces my point. As Duff (2003, 68) observes, the charges of immorality and idolatry leveled against Jezebel are also leveled against Babylon. Ultimately, the author links his opponents to the dominant force that in John’s view is driving the forces of the empire, namely, Satan. Hence, he claims that the throne of Satan is in Pergamon, and intimates that Jezebel teaches the deep things of Satan and that false Jews in Smyrna and Philadelphia constitute a synagogue of Satan.

Second, the rhetorical function of Rev 18:4 is to set John’s removal to Patmos as an example of faithful witness. If the summons to exit Babylon constitutes a command to separate from Roman injustice, immorality, idolatry, and murder, then John’s self-removal to Patmos seeks to model the faithful and prophetic resistance he expects from the seven assemblies. Throughout his exposition of the exigencies in the seven ἐκκλησίαι, the author has been framing an implicit question. If participation in the Roman imperial apparatus amounts to idolatry and fornication, and if those who associate with Babylon will face divine judgment, what should believers do? The divine summons in 18:4 suggests they should exit the socioeconomic and political structures of empire.

For John, this self-removal from imperial structures constitutes a form of faithful witnessing and righteous suffering. Thus, he claims to be at Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (1:9). Scholars have long speculated about John’s stay at Patmos. Some have referred to it as a case of *relegatio in insulam* (banishment for life to a particular island), while others suggest a type of *deportatio in insulam* (the forced removal of the condemned to an island for political reasons);



Yarbro Collins 1984, 102). Nevertheless, those positions are informed by the idea of an imperial persecution.

John's self-removal from an impure and wicked societal structure as a form of prophetic denunciation has a well-cemented precedent in the Qumran community. Like John, the author of the Community Rule describes faithful members of the community in positive terms as the "remnant of Israel" (CD I, 3–11), the "Chosen of Israel" (IV, 2–4), and the "Seed of Israel" (XII, 22). As Florentino García-Martínez (2007, 193) observes, these terms of self-identification elucidate the mechanism of appropriation through which the author rhetorically casts his opponents as "Sons of the Pit" (CD VI, 15). The community also denounced Jews who colluded with Roman invaders as "a horde of Satan" as well as an "assembly of deceit" (1QH 1 II, 22). Qumran writings not only rejected Jewish collusion with Rome but also denounced idolatry, wealth, and ritual impurity. Most important, members of the community separated themselves socio-economically and politically, but also geographically, from Jewish society.

Like the Qumran community, John expects the faithful believers to self-remove themselves from empire in no uncertain terms. Hence, the trial or judgment of Babylon in chapter 18 rhetorically functions as a way to persuade the audience to accept the summons to exit the socioeconomic and political structures of empire. Yet it appears that John sees coming out of Babylon as simultaneously constituting a going into the new Jerusalem, which reveals a clash of geopolitical forces.

### The Geopolitical Forces of Revelation 18

#### Borderlands and Geopolitics

The invitation to exit Babylon points to the inscribed borderlands of Revelation as well as to the geopolitical forces responsible for its creation and function. In biblical studies, scholars often use the term *geopolitics* broadly to describe "the causal relationships between geographical space and political power" (Kwok 2013, 165). Anzaldúa's (1999, 3) notion of borderlands as an *herida abierta* (open wound) that emerges from the grating between the Third World and the First expands this notion of geopolitics. In my view, Anzaldúa's use of borderlands calls us to explore the multiple ways in which antithetical geopolitical forces create spaces where the oppressed can still negotiate imperial power and exercise certain forms of agency. Although the violent and asymmetrical grating creates a wound,

such bloody interaction also creates a third culture, a space, a borderlands culture that challenges the geographical mapping of the world by colonial or imperial powers. Aware, too, of the “uneven geopolitical relationships of power” in the context of undocumented Latinxs, I foreground the relationships of domination and subordination in the text (Segovia 2009, 158). To do so, I first map the grating dynamics between the inscribed geopolitical forces of Rev 18.

### Babylon as a Collapsing Geopolitical Center

Just as the Global North and the Global South, Babylon and the new Jerusalem constitute two geopolitical forces in Revelation. In Rev 17 John presents the splendor and power of Rome by casting it as an overly wealthy woman, who rides a beast and corrupts the kings and inhabitants of the earth with her fornications. The *angelus interpretes* makes the extent of its power and control over the οἰκουμένη clear by pointing out that the reference to waters “are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and languages” (17:15). As scholars have suggested, the rhetoric of fornication does not just refer to sexual immorality but also to religious, political, and economic participation in the Roman imperial apparatus (Mathews 2013, 155). As Phillip Harland (2003, 212) has suggested, guilds in Asia Minor were eager to participate directly or indirectly in cultic honors to Roman emperors and their representatives as a way to bolster their socioeconomic and political networks. Thus, the mighty angel places the kings of the earth on Babylon’s payroll, so to speak, and notes that the merchants of the earth have become rich from Babylon’s luxury (Rev 18:3). From gold to human souls, the lists of cargo items reveal their complicity with Rome in stripping the οἰκουμένη of its resources. But if Rome collapses, where will the nation’s wealth and glory go? I maintain that the judgment and destruction of Babylon signal the rise of the new Jerusalem as an alternative world order and geopolitical center. The basis for such replacement is that, in the author’s view, Rome is a cruel caricature of justice, wealth, and rule for the nations, and thereby constitutes an illegitimate world order.

### The New Jerusalem as Rising Geopolitical Power

The second and antithetical geopolitical force that John identifies in Revelation is the new Jerusalem. Although the author makes reference to the city only four times (3:12, 19; 21:2, 10), its role as an alternative world

order to Babylon and its empire is always evident in the antithetical nature of its description. In the messages to the seven assemblies, Christ promises to write the name of the city on the forehead of the conquering ones (3:12), that is, those who abstain from the idolatrous and immoral socioeconomic and political system that Babylon promotes. In chapter 19, John also juxtaposes the new Jerusalem (the bride) and the Lamb with Babylon and the beast it rides, as well as with the world order they seem to represent.

While Babylon emerges as a whore, the new Jerusalem appears as a bride. Whereas the former rides a beast (a Roman emperor) that deceives the nations and requires worship, the latter is set to marry a lamb (Jesus) that has ransomed peoples from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Whereas Satan is ultimately the power of the Roman imperial apparatus, God enables both the Lamb and the new Jerusalem. Whereas Babylon can boast about the exotic and wealthy cargoes it receives, the new Jerusalem is itself quite affluent. The city is made of gold “clear as glass” (21:18), and all sorts of precious stones—including jasper, sapphire, agate, emerald, onyx, carnelian, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, and amethyst—adorn its foundations (21:19–21).

Although both cities are immensely wealthy, Rome’s wealth is *sordida et vulgaris*, since it derives from trade. By contrast, not only is the new Jerusalem sumptuous, but its wealth, according to Royalty (1998, 200), lacks the stain that accompanies riches obtained through commerce. The requirements to access each city, too, reflect the distinction above. Believers who want to access Rome’s wealth must be willing to compromise with its immoral and idolatrous system, whereas those who want to access the real property of the new Jerusalem must abstain from food offered to idols and fornication (22:15). Thus, for the author of Revelation, the call to exit Babylon is also an invitation to enter the new Jerusalem and vice versa.

### The Bloody Grating: Draining the World’s Resources

#### The Food and Labor Supply of the Nations

The geopolitical forces involved in a borderlands situation not only are antithetical but, as Anzaldúa remarks, grate violently against one another. According to John, Babylon drains the resources of the *οἰκουμένη* through corruption, violence, and commerce. He denounces that not only the kings of the nations but also the merchants and sailors play a fundamental role in mitigating Babylon’s thirst for luxury. For instance, their cargo for

Rome not only includes luxury items such as gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple, silk, and scarlet but also “wine, olive oil, choice flour and wheat, cattle, and sheep” (18:11). Aware of their dependency on foreign grain and the potential for political instability that it can create, Roman emperors such as Tiberius and Claudius provided economic incentives for provincial merchants in service of the *Annona* (Kraybill 1996, 119). Rome not only consumed a large part of the world’s food supply, but also the labor force that produced it. Along with the cargo of sheep, cattle, and beast of burden, one also finds *σώματα* or “slaves” (18:13). This reference to the slave trade is unsurprising. According to Jürgen Roloff (1993, 206), “The lavish lifestyle of the Roman kingdoms was mainly made possible by the fact that, in their homes, multitudes of slaves were available as cheap labor.” But the violence of the borderlands situation also emerges in the loss of human lives.

### Violence and Death

The violent grating or struggle between Babylon and the new Jerusalem is also evident in the fate or violent death of their respective associates. As Anzaldúa observes, the borderlands is an *herida abierta* or “open wound” not merely in a symbolic sense. This violence leads me to consider how ancient borderlands subjects were affected by their own geopolitical and violent situation. One of the charges against Babylon, for instance, is the perverse forms of violence it condones. Bruce Metzger (2006, 86) discusses the ambiguous term *ἀνθρώπων ψυχὰς*, or “souls of humans,” and suggests that it might refer to slaves who were mostly destined to die for the entertainment of bloodthirsty crowds in Roman amphitheaters. This is perhaps a reference to the *damnati ad bestias*, which included slaves who were gladiators and common convicts (*noxii*). Even then, as Donald Kyle (1998, 91) observes, there was a difference in hierarchy of status, skill, and hope. Whereas the death of a gladiator was agonistic, *noxii* were set to face *summa supplicia*, or the most wretched form of capital punishment. Thus, “*noxii* are shown nude or nearly nude, with bound hand or bound to posts, under the control of arena handlers or in the grasp of beasts” (91).

Revelation denounces this violence directly in 18:24: “And in you was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on earth.” This charge includes those whose souls under the altar cry for vengeance: “How long, O Lord, holy and genuine, will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

(6:9–10). However, some of Babylon’s associates are also set to experience a violent death under the system that the new Jerusalem represents. Whereas Jesus threatens to kill Jezebel’s “children” (2:23), he promises to make war against those embracing the teaching of Balaam (εἰδωλόβυτα and πορνεία), and to do so with the sword coming out of his mouth (2:16). He fulfills the promise in the upcoming eschatological battle: “And the rest were killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh” (19:21). All that killing generates a complex borderlands situation that the followers of both the Lamb and the beast must negotiate.

### Decolonization

Ultimately, the violent grating between the new Jerusalem and Babylon manifests itself in the decolonization of the οἰκουμένη, or the violent replacement of one structure by another (Fanon 2004, 37). Just as Babylon has taken over the world, the new Jerusalem stands to occupy its place on grounds that the world order it represents is but a caricature of divine justice and order. Thus, the existing order must be done away with violently, and this is what we see unfolding in the threefold literary structure of which chapter 18 is a part (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991, 95). Following a rising-and-falling action pattern, Rev 17:1–18 introduces the might and luxury of the Babylon and its exotic beast (rising action), whereas Rev 18:1–24 elaborates on its crimes, trial, and imminent collapse (climax). Now, Rev 19:1–9 discloses the marriage feast of the lamb with its bride, the new Jerusalem (denouement), and the heavenly celebration of Babylon’s collapse. Indeed, the three hallelujahs of heaven and earth correspond to the three dirges over Babylon and constitute a response to the invitation to rejoice over the fall of Babylon in 18:20 (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991, 101). However, the demise is not immediate, and the bloody grating between Babylon and the new Jerusalem creates a third space, a borderland where believers must negotiate between the two geopolitical areas. While it is true that John speaks of God’s empire as an upcoming reality, he expects his audience to live it out as if it were already a present reality.

### The Borderlands of Revelation

The violent interaction between the new Jerusalem and Babylon creates a borderland that the inscribed audience must negotiate. As Anzaldúa points

out, the United States–Mexico borderlands constitute a third cultural space between the Global North and the Global South. The bloody grating between the United States and Mexico in the so-called Mexican War of 1846 resulted in the annexation of almost half of Mexico. Thousands of Mexicans citizens already inhabiting California, Arizona, and Texas never crossed the border, but the border crossed them. As Josue David Cisneros (2013, 12) observes, this statement inverts “the common notion that borders are static and natural entities that humans must encounter and cross.” Similarly, in the inscribed borderlands of Revelation, Rome has rearranged the geography of the ancient world in such a way that its geopolitical borders have crossed the inhabitants of the conquered territories.

In the vision of the woman who rides the beast in chapter 17, the *angelus interpres* points to the totality of Babylon’s control over the ancient world by interpreting the waters, on which the harlot sits, as the subjugated peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations (17:15). As chapter 18 points out, this includes the kings of the nations, who have colluded with Babylon in her conquests or, in the language of John, committed fornication with her (18:3), even though they eventually abandon her in fear of judgment (18:9–10). Unsurprisingly, in the inscribed geography of Revelation, Babylon has turned key cities of Asia Minor into borderlands of sorts, where people must now align themselves socially, economically, politically, and culturally with the imperial capital. In other words, they did not cross Babylon’s borders, but Babylon’s borders crossed them.

#### Anzaldúa’s *Atravesados*

The annexation, conquest, or colonization that creates a borderland simultaneously creates a diaspora, colonized subjects, or in this case borderlands subjects. In its annexation of Mexican territories such as California, Arizona, and Texas, the United States also annexed their unwanted population. Unprotected and stranded in the new geopolitical reality, these inhabitants became the troublesome *Atravesados*, “who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the normal” (Anzaldúa 1999, 3). Embracing, rather than fearing, their socioeconomic and political instability, they have created a third culture between the Global South and the Global North. They must still negotiate this third space. Shamed as *Pochos* for speaking Spanish poorly and harassed by the English-only advocates in the United States, borderlands subjects have a linguistic creativity that Anzaldúa (78) describes as a wild tongue, which can indeed be cut but

never tamed. Looking for *Los Atravesados* in the inscribed borderlands of Revelation requires not only that we read against the grain but that we look at the various ways they are negotiating imperial power, whether it be by creating third cultural spaces or by developing a wild tongue that defies John's rhetorical construction of reality.

### *Los Atravesados* of Revelation

Although the divine voice addresses the inscribed audience as "my people," those who associate with Babylon appear as utterly corrupt, foreign, dangerous, indecisive, exotic, and doomed figures (Thimmes 2009, 81). Most important, John ties all his "others" or *Atravesados* to the rhetoric of fornication and idolatry.

The merchants emerge as greedy provincials whose obsession with profit is evident not only in their engagement with the slave trade but also in their mourning the loss of profit rather than the demise of Babylon itself (Rev 18:11). While John describes the merchants' relationship with Rome in economic terms, rather than in the language of fornication (Royalty 1998, 207), it is also true that he casts financial participation in imperial structures as a form of fornication and idolatry. As John notes, no one could buy or sell without the mark of the beast (13:17). This view is consistent with John's vilification of the teaching of rival teachers and prophets in the seven assemblies as *εἰδωλόθυτα* and *πορνεία*. In his view, this teaching encourages open participation in the perverse socioeconomic and political structures of empire, and thereby must be denounced.

Simultaneously, he rhetorically constructs a Thyatiran prophetess who promotes such teaching as a Jezebel in order to denounce her as foreign, promiscuous, and idolatrous. In doing so, he strategically positions himself to play the role of the persecuted prophet Elijah (Thimmes 2009, 81), which could further reinforce the idea that he moved to Patmos on his terms. He also accuses some in Pergamon of holding the teaching of Balaam (2:14), and he lambasts those in Laodicea for their claims to wealth and self-sufficiency: "For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (3:17).

In short, John constructs the *Atravesados* of Revelation as idolatrous, sexually immoral, and greedy believers who are willing to compromise with Babylon for the sake of economic and political gain. Yet, is such activity a compromise or a form of negotiating the geopolitical borderlands of



Revelation? Answering this question requires that we interrogate John's rhetorical construction of his others and consider their strategies for navigating their ancient borderlands.

### Negotiating the Borderlands of Revelation

The command to exit Babylon in Rev 18:4 presupposes that a group of believers is actively engaged in the socioeconomic and political structures of the Roman Empire. Indeed, the overall characteristic of the *Atravesados* of Revelation is that they do not see a contradiction, or refuse to accept one, between their faith and their civic obligations. Although John casts the stance of the *Atravesados* as an immoral and idolatrous compromise, the inscribed others of John have opted to negotiate the borderlands. These others includes all those who seem to have been lured by Babylon: the Balaamites (2:14–16), Jezebel (2:20–23), the “greedy” Laodiceans (3:14–22), and the merchants (18:11).

The lack of condemnation of the merchants and the prosperous situation of some, such as the Laodiceans, has led Duff (2001, 69) to suggest that a “silent majority” audience of Revelation were engaged in trade/commerce. Since John does not want to alienate these undecided members of the community, “[He] condemns the action (in this case, Commerce) without too forthrightly condemning the actors (the merchants and consumers) in his audience” (69). While one might agree with this view, from a borderlands perspective the indecisive or ambiguous stance of the *Atravesados* seems quite deliberate. They negotiate between the empire of God and the empire of the dragon without fully committing to either one.

In this sense, they not only inhabit the borderlands but also embody its apparently troubling ambiguity, and John seems to find this approach disturbing. In his view, *Los Atravesados* of Revelation are “neither hot nor cold” (3:15) but “lukewarm” (χλιαρός). This charge of lukewarmness points precisely to the *Atravesados*'s determination to negotiate the borderlands that the grating between Babylon and the new Jerusalem creates. Furthermore, it signals their refusal to make a commitment to either one of them, something John would certainly prefer: “I wish you were either hot or cold” (3:15c). Since that stance has enabled his others to prosper economically, John relativizes their wealth, noting that they are poor (3:17), as well as the poverty of his followers, noting that they are rich (2:9). Of course, such reversal anticipates that, in the shifting geopolitical realities of the



inscribed borderlands, the new Jerusalem will replace Babylon and display even greater wealth.

### Self-Deportation: Attrition through Enforcement

#### Enforcing Attrition

To encourage *Atravesados* to exit Babylon and to get them to abandon their liminal, ambiguous, and apparently deviant behavior, John threatens them not only with potential punishments but also with the denial of services that faithful believers, citizens, as it were, of the new Jerusalem would enjoy. The messages to the victors list some of them: (1) eating from the tree of life (Rev 2:7), (2) immunity against the second death (2:11), (3) access to the hidden manna (2:17), (4) authority over the nations (2:26), (5) keeping one's name in the book of life (3:5) and receiving the mark of God and the Lamb (3:12), and (6) sharing Jesus's throne (3:20). Whereas faithful believers stand to receive all these benefits, the *Atravesados* will not get a green card to enter the new Jerusalem and the socioeconomic and political benefits it entails.

Reminiscent of Donald Trump's fantasy for a border wall, John keenly notes that the new Jerusalem "has a great, high wall with twelve gates," with its border patrol (21:12–13). Seeking to minimize the presence of the high walls and the gates of the new Jerusalem, commentators such as Jürgen Roloff (1993, 242) observe, "Walls and gates were, as many excavations indicate, common parts of a city and important for its outward appearance." This borderlands reading, however, makes evident that the gates are meant to keep the unwanted others outside, and the presence of guarding angels confirms it. While the city's doors are open, it is only for those whose names are in the book of life (20:12), or John's immigration database.

#### Attrition in Revelation

John's attrition-through-enforcement rhetoric has a second dimension, namely, threats of punishment, suffering, poverty, and death. John intimates just as much when he notes that leaving Babylon is a must to avoid participating in its sins and concomitant punishments (18:4). As a geopolitical space under the control of dominant culture, the borderlands, as Anzaldúa (1999, 3) reminds us, are also a place filled with threats and perils: "Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed,

shot.” Since *Los Atravesados* have not heeded John’s warning signs, they are to be subjected to various horrific threats.

While John’s proxy, Christ, threatens the Balaamites of Pergamon with the sword (2:16–17), he threatens Jezebel with sickness, and her children with death (2:23a). As I note above, the Laodiceans receive threats of poverty, insofar as their fortunes, like those of the merchants, collapse in the conflagration of Babylon. Similarly, those negotiating the borderlands between Babylon and the new Jerusalem, between the empire of God and the empire of Satan, will face economic ruin if they do not exit Babylon. Overall, *Los Atravesados*, whom John casts as idolaters and fornicators, are to be thrown into the lake of fire and suffer the second death (21:8).

### Reforming *Los Atravesados*

The ultimate goal of attrition through enforcement strategies is to get *Atravesados* to change their unruly behavior and illegal stance by self-removing from the structures of Babylon and its empire. As Anzaldúa (1999, 4) notes, “Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens—whether they possess documents or not, whether they are Chicanos, Indians or Blacks.” Indeed, the self-declared native population of the Global North often constructs *Atravesados* not only as illegal aliens but also as disease carriers—or, as Trump would have it, as “drug traffickers and rapists.” The only way to be deemed law-abiding citizens is to stop being *Atravesados* and to become *Pochos* or anglicized Mexicans who have betrayed their ancestral culture (78). Similarly, for John, the rival teachers and prophets in the ἐκκλησίαι of Asia Minor must abandon their lukewarm stance, or the cautious negotiating stance toward the borderlands, and do so in rather concrete terms. They must self-deport from the socioeconomic and political structures of Babylon. However, Jezebel and her followers are unwilling to change their lukewarm approaches for dealing with the borderlands situation. Thus, John observes, “I gave her [Jezebel] the time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication” (2:21). Despite John’s attrition through enforcement strategies, *Los Atravesados* of Revelation refuse to reform.

### Conclusion

The literal self-deportation of undocumented Latinxs such as Liz Mateo, who is now a law student at Santa Clara University, led me to consider the

ways in which undocumented Latinx communities appropriate biblical texts and the implications of such readings. Considering our geopolitical location in the US borderlands, I critique the ways in which readings from the Global North and the Global South hardly interrogate John's rhetoric of self-exclusion and empire. Thus, they could reinforce the socioeconomic and political disfranchisement of the undocumented Latinx community in the United States. In order to problematize such readings and unveil the power dynamics inscribed in the text, I read Rev 18:4 as a serious call for the self-deportation of the inscribed audience from imperial structures.

Drawing on borderlands theory and the struggles of the Latinx community struggles against attrition-through-enforcement initiatives, I map the geopolitical forces of Revelation, the borderlands these create, and the ways in which the inscribed audience set out to negotiate them. Rather than following John's rhetorical vilification of their lukewarm stance, I read his others in light of Anzaldúa's notion of *Los Atravesados*. These borderlands subjects turn the liminal spaces they inhabit into areas of both resistance and negotiation. In my view, *Los Atravesados* of Revelation are dexterously negotiating the socioeconomic and political borderlands between Babylon and the new Jerusalem. Therefore, John denies them citizenship in the new Jerusalem and threatens them with poverty, sickness, and death. In other words, he seeks to make their lives so miserable that they will have no choice but to self-deport from Babylon.

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## From Complicity to Resistance: Reading Revelation 18 in the Context of Asian American Ambivalence

Raj Nadella

Revelation 18 reads like a breaking news report about a major metropolitan center experiencing a financial meltdown, akin to a modern stock-market crash. Economic terminology referring to merchants, transportation of luxury goods, and cargoes full of unsold merchandise appears prominently. It is not entirely clear what those terms mean within the literary context of this chapter or what their significance might have been within the political and ecclesial contexts of John's community. In this study I argue that Rev 18 exposes Rome's unjust economic structures and critiques the imperial ethos that undergirds them, but also predicts, perhaps even sanctions, Rome's downfall. The chapter especially lays bare the empire's centripetal economic structures that had adversely affected people in the colonies.

I suggest that the seer's critique is aimed both at Rome and at "my people," likely members of his community who may have maintained close political and economic proximity to corridors of power and participated in Rome's agenda by allowing themselves to be lured by its immoral pursuit and ostentatious display of wealth. The chapter calls attention to the role "my people" may have played in perpetuating such oppressive economic structures and offers them a prescription. They are asked to examine their own complicity in the empire and not remain a part of its oppressive practices.

I explicate the motif of "my people" within the context of Asian American experience, specifically South Asian experience, in the United States. In this essay, I employ the terms *Asian American* and *South Asian* interchangeably at times, with the realization that the two terms capture similar social locations, at least in the context of United States, but are

also sufficiently distinct. Many South Asians in North America occupy a hybrid space—at the margins in terms of racial, ethnic heritage, but often at the center in terms of economic and educational access and clout. Despite being in the mainstream of economic structures, or perhaps because of it, many Asians are often ambivalent about their relationship with the dominant society. To build on Diana Taylor's (1991, 67) insights, their hybridity pertains to their belonging to two locations and being able to move between the two locations with great ease.

Paradoxically, the complexity of their location undermines their ability to determine how best to relate to power structures at the center. Do they resist them in general, or do they go along with the dominant community's attempts to co-opt them by portraying them as model minorities and embrace the notion that their future is secured by moving closer to whiteness? What do they gain or lose by maintaining proximity to the center of power and becoming complicit in power structures? What do they lose or gain by heeding the seer's call to "come out" of it? What might staying within or coming out of it look like in specific social contexts today where boundaries are porous and permeable? These are some key questions this essay explores.

### Rome's Fall: A Grand Reversal in Fortunes

In one of the disturbingly vivid images in the book of Revelation, the seer depicts, or perhaps envisions, merchants of the earth weeping and mourning over Babylon, because they have shiploads of commodities to sell but no buyers. Rome, which used to be their customer, has lost its purchasing power seemingly unexpectedly. The seer's focus on merchants who have benefited from their participation in the imperial economic enterprise and concern about their current plight is rather intriguing. Apparently, the seer's primary concern might not be with what is described in this chapter but with what is not mentioned. From the seer's perspective, the tragedy is not that the merchants now have few buyers for their products—luxury items or essential goods—but that Rome has been their sole buyer and customer hitherto.

All the produce is waiting to be purchased in the metropolitan center, while those at the peripheries of the empire have little access to those goods—luxury products as well as essential goods. As Aelius Aristides (*Rom.* 12) aptly describes it, "so many merchants arrive here with cargoes from all over, at every season, and with each return of the harvest, that the



city seems like the common warehouse of the world that was the destination of all the goods produced all the other parts of the world.” All the shipments of commodities are brought to Rome because a vast majority of the people in the Roman Empire cannot afford any of it. In John’s description, there are goods of all kinds, but the people who likely had a role in producing them have now been denied access to them. Seen in this light, Rev 18 implicitly calls attention to the consequences of global economic structures Rome had institutionalized over a long period of time—structures that facilitated and ensured movements of goods from the margins of the empire to the metropolitan center while depriving those in the colonies of their access to goods (Bauckham 2000, 57).

Amartya Sen, an economist of Indian origin, describes a similar phenomenon leading up to a major famine in Bengal, the eastern part of India, in 1943 that resulted in the deaths of three to four million Indians. British historians of the Victorian era, who have written about it, generally called it the “Bengal famine” and exhibited a proclivity to suggest that the tragedy occurred because there was insufficient food to feed all the people in India at that time. Amid the intensity of that famine, Winston Churchill offered a Malthusian view of the crisis when he suggested that the food crisis occurred because of the overpopulation in India (Tharoor 2018, 159–61). Churchill is said to have suggested that, in the words of Leo Amery, “Indians had a propensity to breed like rabbits and will outstrip any available food supply” (cited in Tharoor 2018, 160).

Sen witnessed the famine as a child in the then-undivided Bengal. In his seminal work on famine and poverty, which won him the 1998 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, he challenged the longstanding imperial narrative about the causes of that famine (Sen 1999, 39–43). He argued, with well-documented evidence, that, while natural calamities and crop failures might contribute to extreme food shortages, social structures as well as political and economic policies, such as hoarding of food, are generally the most important factors that engender famine.

Sen observed how the extensive network of warehouses operated by the British in the 1940s had more than enough food for everyone in India at the time. The empire prioritized distribution of food grain to the military, as a result of which ordinary Indians had restricted access to grain and other essential commodities, resulting in the deaths of millions (Sen 1999, 88–91). The imperial forces and the wealthy associated with the empire were engaged in practices of hoarding food in the hope of selling it at exorbitant prices at an opportune time. The empire alone had the

purchasing power and used it to store food grains for the exclusive benefit of its imperial network within and outside the country. The end result of such policies and practices was that the people who produced the goods and essential commodities such as wheat and rice were deprived of access to their produce.

If one reads Rev 18 in light of Sen's work, one sees a political critique of the nature and dehumanizing effects of Rome's economic structures, which were institutionalized in order to ensure that the empire and the elite associated with it had exclusive access to luxury goods and essential commodities. Revelation 18 is also a commentary on how such structures might eventually undermine the welfare of the empire itself and others who become complicit in its economic agenda. I return to this point below.

### A Critique of "My People"

Revelation 18 is not a critique of the empire and its oppressive economic practices alone. The chapter also critiques "my people" for their part in facilitating and perpetuating those practices and structures. There is a juxtaposition of voices in this chapter. While one voice (vv. 1–3) calls attention to the moral decadence of the empire, another voice (vv. 4–7) calls on "my people" to come out of Babylon. They are to come out so that they will not "share in the sins of Babylon nor receive any of her plagues." Who are "my people" within the context of this chapter and within the sociopolitical contexts of the Roman empire? What might be the significance of the phrase "come out" in the context of Rome's economic practices?

There are diverse explanations of the sociopolitical location of "my people." An explanation frequently offered is that they were people at the margins of the empire and associated with John's church, but likely participated in Rome's oppressive economic practices on some level. Revelation 18:4–5 suggests that they might have been complicit in the empire's oppressive economy in at least two ways.

First, there is proclivity on the part of colonized communities to desire that which is associated with those in power. At times, powerless communities submit themselves to people in power and imitate them in the hope of acquiring some power for themselves. In one of his seminal novels, *The Mimic Men*, Vidiadhar Naipaul details his perception of his landlord, Mr. Shylock, a person of European descent. He is attracted to everything he associated with his landlord and seeks to imitate it (Naipaul 2001). What becomes evident in this story is a desire for power and an attempt to gain

access to it through proximity to those in power, but also by perpetuating the structures that have been put in place by those in power. Naipaul highlights how those who imitate the dominant will invariably allow themselves to be used by people in power much more than they gain from doing so.

If one applies this motif of desire for power to Rev 18, what stands out is the lure of imperial economics for those who are outside the structures. The text calls attention to the complicity of marginalized people in the oppressive economic structures that serve Babylon but in turn penalize them. Their complicity, driven partly by desire for power, is a phenomenon similar to the seer's depiction of the lamb that imitates the beast. Seen in this light, Rev 18:2 and 4 suggest that the seer's critique is as much about the marginalized as it is about those who are in power. These verses also illustrate how those at the edges sometimes help perpetuate the structures that deny them access to dignity or at least have the potential to do so.

The second manner of complicity with imperial economic structures pertains to the acquiescence on the part of marginalized communities to the imperial narrative about underlying reasons for their impoverished state of affairs. Again, Sen's work implicitly highlights how the British successfully promoted a convenient imperial narrative about the factors that contributed to the famine. In their narrative, the famine occurred either because of the failure of crops for successive years or because the population in India was growing at an unsustainable rate (Sen 1999). Sen highlights how such explanations were accepted as facts not just by the British Empire and by its Indian collaborators, but also by those who were disenfranchised by British policies and had much to gain from challenging such imperial narratives.

### "My People" with the Means

There is more to the identity or socioeconomic location of "my people." Not all Christians were poor or at the margins in the context of the book of Revelation. The "my people" possibly also refers to those at relatively upper echelons of the society who might have been participating in the imperial economy—the merchants and others who engaged in business transactions with the city. These wealthier Christian communities and individuals prospered in the Roman economy and found it "expedient to accommodate the current economic and political order (2:14, 20; 3:17)" (Koester 2008, 766). They cannot come out of the city unless they are already in it, spatially or figuratively.

As Craig Koester (2008, 767) helpfully observes, “Some of the Christians addressed by John might have regarded Rome’s commercial influence negatively, but others did not.” Merchants from Asia Minor, some of whom likely also included John’s audience, participated in the slave trade and profited from it. Merchants played a key role in perpetuating the empire, partly because they were convinced that their welfare was dependent on perpetuating the structures instituted by Babylon. The “my people” seemed to have participated in, and sought to benefit from, the empire’s economic activity due to their own pursuit of power (Callahan 2009, 50). Seen in this light, Rev 18 is a prophetic critique both of the empire and of the seer’s own people who subscribed to the imperial ideology and actively participated in it. Specifically, Rev 18:3 appears to explicate how various groups enriched themselves by accentuating Babylon’s dehumanizing enterprise.

### A Call to “My People”

Within this context of “my people” occupying a dual identity, the seer appears to exhort them to “come out” of Babylon (18:4) with an exhortation, or a call to the community to detach themselves from desire for power and to distance themselves from the lure and effects of imperial economics. The text describes existing realities, but it also envisions a reality in which “my people” refuse to participate in the economy of Babylon. But how do they come out when their everyday lives are so intrinsically connected to the imperial economics in all the destructive ways? How do they resist, or excuse themselves, from economic and political structures that suit their interests and sustain them? How does one challenge and refuse participation in oppressive global economic structures for which they have fascination and from which they have a lot to gain? How do the “my people” come out of the empire while spatially remaining within it?

### Moral but Not Spatial Separation

Several scholars have suggested that the call “Come out of her, my people” (Rev 18:4) refers to moral separation, not necessarily to spatial separation. Koester (2001, 164) writes,

The call to “come out of her” echoes a similar plea by Jeremiah (Jer. 51:45 and Isaiah) but it is not meant as a physical departure from an actual

city. John's readers lived in Asia Minor, not in Babylon or Rome (Rev. 17:5, 9). The angelic voice beckons them to dissociate themselves from the infidelity and materialism that were the hallmarks of the great city's trade, following instead in the ways of the Lamb.

Rome might be a place, an imperial city, but for the prophet it is a city that embodies and actively promotes an ideology. The empire is less of a location but more a worldview, an ideology, and an ethos.

Given this ideological dimension of spaces, the seer highlights how various individuals and communities that were part of his community and spatially outside Rome were nevertheless *in* Rome by being complicit in its structures. While the merchants who benefited from trading with Rome were prominently complicit, it appears that the "my people" may not be not exempt from some level of criticism for their own role in perpetuating oppression of others. As Allen Callahan (2009, 51) observes, "Rome maintained its hegemony through subordinated alliances, vassal kings, and a network of merchants and retainer classes."

Some within the seer's community participated in the imperial agenda of oppressing those at the margins and enriched themselves at the expense of the latter. Again, as Koester (2001, 164) observes, "When the heavenly voice cries 'come out of her, my people' (18:4), it speaks especially to readers who are being lulled into complacency by their prosperity, or who find compromising the integrity of their faith to be a reasonable price to pay for the favors offered by the harlot." As long as various communities such as the "my people" continue to support the empire, Rome has no impetus to change its ways, but turning their backs on the empire might well force Rome to replace centripetal structures with more distributive and more sustainable practices.

### Coming Out as an Act of Self-Preservation

Even as the seer exposes the complicity of his people in the empire, his call to them to come out appears to stem from a commitment to their own welfare and safety. The prophet is attempting to move them, as participants in the structures of the empire as well as its beneficiaries, away from those structures. Why should they distance themselves from a city and an ideology that have enriched them and that promise to safeguard their economic and political interests? What incentivizes them to excuse themselves from institutions that have granted them access and privilege? The seer seems to

suggest that the people should excuse themselves so that they do not share in the empire's deadly plagues.

The Greek word *πλήγη* has a moral dimension to it and suggests that the people should leave Rome so that they are no longer associated with the city's immorality, but there is also a pragmatic dimension to it. The term *πλήγη* has the connotation of a deathly stroke, a mortal wound, or a deadly blow that might be the result of divine punishment. The seer is encouraging the people to leave so that they will not suffer from Rome's mortal wound. It is pertinent to note that the seer is calling on his audience to come out precisely when Rome is experiencing catastrophic economic situation. The city is about to fall not necessarily due to a divine intervention the seer might be envisioning but under the weight of its own unsustainable economic practices (see Rev 14:8–15:1; 18:2–24).

The centripetal economic structures Rome has carefully built and institutionalized over the years are about to collapse under the weight of the sins that Rome continues to amass. As Callahan (2009, 51; cf. Bauckham 2000, 56) observes, "The cargo manifestly functions as a long list of exhibits that are evidence of the charges against Babylon. It ends with slavery, which is emphasized both by its position at the end of the list and its exegetical gloss of *Somaton*, 'slaves,' as *psychas anthropon*, 'the souls of human beings.'"

The relationship of "my people" with Rome has granted them access to power, but a continued relationship undermines their self-interest. The seer critiques people who have been sacrificing their long-term health and well-being in pursuit of short-term gains and calls on them to turn their backs on Rome, whose foundations are built on the backs of the marginalized. However, the act of coming out would be based not just on moral values but also on their own self-interests. Babylon as described in Rev 18 eerily resembles the contemporary American empire and its political economy, which is built on the backs of minoritized communities—Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, immigrants, and sexual minorities. Furthermore, the slavery that the seer explicitly mentions in 18:13 has striking parallels in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which dehumanized twelve million people and laid the foundations for the prosperity of the American empire (Bauckham 2000, 56).

### Asian Americans as "My People"

Asian Americans in the United States, and Indian Americans in particular, occupy a hybrid location in the political and economic structures

of the United States. Indian Americans constitute about 1 percent of the US population, but their influence in those structures is disproportionately high. According to a study undertaken by the Pew Research Center, “Indian Americans are among the most highly educated racial or ethnic groups in the U.S. 70% of Indian Americans aged twenty-five and older had college degrees in 2010 ... 2.5 times the rate among the overall U.S. population. More data from the American Community Survey provides further detail: 40.6% of Indian Americans twenty-five and older have graduate or professional degrees” (DeSilver 2014). The study also found that the median annual household income for Indian Americans was nearly 70 percent higher than median household income for all US households. South Asians occupy leading positions in many major American corporations and educational institutions.

In short, the South Asian community occupies a hybrid space in the United States: they are at the margins because of their nonwhiteness, but they are at the center in terms of their economic and educational status. Given their economic progress and current status, the South Asian community in the United States has increasingly moved away from the margins to the center on many levels. Many in the Indian American community have gradually moved to the cultural and political mainstream of the nation, also often aligning themselves with the American empire in various forms of exclusion—social, cultural, and economic. Given their economic clout and growing influence, South Asians often participate in the empire’s agenda of perpetuating exclusionary structures. For many, such participation becomes the means of moving into the mainstream and gaining access to power, with the result that their success comes at the expense of many other marginalized communities and results in the replication of the systems by which they were oppressed not too long ago. Two examples illustrate this phenomenon of South Asian pursuit of power on the backs of other marginalized groups: (1) the Asian American Lawsuit for “Fair Admissions” and (2) *Mississippi Masala*—a South Asian movie.

#### Asian American Lawsuit for Fair Admissions

The recent lawsuit brought by Students for Fair Admissions, a group of Asian American students denied admission to Harvard University, is an example of an attempt by communities in hybrid spaces, Asian Americans in this case, to pursue privilege at the expense of others significantly more marginalized than them. In its court case against the university, Students

for Fair Admissions argued that at least 43 percent of each admitted class at Harvard University would be Asian American if academic performance were the sole criterion for admission (Kuo 2018). This lawsuit against Harvard stands out for at least three reasons. First, it targets more minoritized communities, such as African American applicants, by seeking to decrease their numbers in the admissions process. Second, it seeks to posit, and perhaps perpetuate, the notion that Asian Americans are intellectually superior to, and academically more prepared than, other minority groups and hence more entitled to admission into elite universities such as Harvard. Third, it was supported by Edward Blum, a white male, in cooperation with the Justice Department of the Trump administration and received the support of a few white supremacy groups (Benner 2018).

In an article in *The Atlantic*, Iris Kuo (2018) details another lawsuit by James Damore, a white male former engineer at Google, which alleged that the company consistently and systematically discriminated against white and Asian men. These two lawsuits are part of a pattern of white groups seeking to, or perhaps appearing to, advocate on behalf of Asian Americans. In several such cases, the latter have reciprocated by aligning themselves with their white advocates. This newfound alliance of whites and Asian Americans reflects a familiar white tendency to see Asian Americans as the “similar Other,” who is not quite white but is closer to whiteness than any other racial/ethnic group. Asian Americans are the Other but are, nevertheless, similar to white. Conversely, they are the similar but still the Other.

The otherness apart, white advocacy on behalf of Asian Americans highlights a strategy of coopting the similar Other, the close-to-white Other—not only to further disenfranchise the other Other, those at the farthest margins, but also to reinforce whiteness as the norm one should seek. The latter’s reciprocity highlights an alliance of convenience and a symbiotic relationship that is designed to benefit both communities at the expense of more minoritized communities. White advocacy also reflects what Kuo (2018) calls the “Whitening of Asian Americans,” or what one might consider as the Asian American pursuit of whiteness.

An aspect of this phenomenon is that Asian Americans, South Asians included, often find themselves in the position of similar Other, which is in close proximity to the center on many levels but presents itself as the marginalized Other. In this way, the Asian American project has been about attempting to belong to both spaces—center and margins—and to benefit from both. The phenomenon of the similar Other also stems from



Asian American ambivalence, which is reflected in the community's tendency to identify with both privilege and margins. Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity and the resultant ambivalence on the part of individuals and communities who occupy hybrid spaces become relevant here. Bhabha (1996) describes hybridity as an in-between space where a lot of translation and negotiation occurs. As he himself notes, hybrid spaces are sites of ambivalence where cultural meaning, representation, and commitment are not the norm (Bhabha 1994).

The Asian American ambivalence is akin to merchants in Rev 18, who participated in Rome's imperial project and in the commodification of people in the colonies. They sought to enrich themselves at the expense of others, all the while claiming not to belong to the empire. Asian American communities have participated in the American imperial enterprise and benefited from it immensely, often at the expense of more marginalized communities. The seer's critique exposes their double location and insists that continuing in such a double location of convenience accentuates the imperial project and is detrimental to their own economic and political interests.

As an Asian American, I hear the seer's words in Rev 18 as a critique of my community's complicity in the American imperial enterprise and its proclivity to participate in the empire's economic, political, and educational structures and benefit from them at the expense of more marginalized communities. I explicate the seer's exhortation to come out as a call to refuse to align ourselves with the oppressive ethos and hegemonic practices of the American empire in its various manifestations. It is a call to decline participation in institutions that might benefit me and my community but marginalize other minority communities with significantly less access to power.

Furthermore, the seer's call becomes a suggestion that the welfare of Asian Americans is dependent on refusing participation in the empire and leaving its military, political, and economic enterprise, so that they are not made accountable for its evil practices or made to suffer from its deadly plagues. The center has become corrupt and is marked by unfettered greed, violence, and dehumanization; as such, it has become increasingly uncondusive for habitation. Read in this context, Rev 18 highlights the need for solidarity with the oppressed for ethical and moral reasons, but also for practical reasons. An insight from the chapter is that Asian American welfare is intrinsically connected both to a departure from the center and an intentional alignment with other marginalized communities—for moral reasons and strategic reasons.

*Mississippi Masala: South Asian Imperial Replication*

In her book *Not Quite Not White: Losing and Finding Race in America*, Sharmila Sen highlights the proclivity of many South Asians to shape their identity as one that is distinct from those of other, more marginalized minority communities, such as African Americans and Hispanics. Sen explicates the ways in which some South Asians view setting themselves apart from African Americans as the pathway to gaining proximity to whiteness. She states, “Many first-generation Indian immigrants in America boast of their low divorce rates and high household incomes; their old gods and their new-construction homes. Beneath these claims is a singular, fearful drumbeat refrain: ‘We are Not Black, we are Not Black, we are Not Black’” (Sen 2018, 123).<sup>1</sup>

Sen aptly names the heavy price in-between people will inevitably pay for giving into the lure of whiteness and allowing themselves to be used as tools that enhance the dominant community’s economic, political, and cultural interests in return for mere acceptance as model minority. Immigrants and many nonwhites are expected to assimilate and often seek to assimilate—culturally, linguistically, economically, and even morally—by subscribing to the ethos and values espoused by many in the white community. In the case of South Asians, such assimilation happens generally by means of their establishing themselves at the expense of communities who have been systematically excluded from socioeconomic structures and educational institutions. Sen (2018, 122–23) makes this point by quoting Toni Morrison, who “once wrote that the road to becoming American is built on the backs of Blacks.”

Sen’s work is reminiscent of Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, which calls attention to the problematic phenomenon that takes place when people of color imitate whiteness in the hope of gaining greater access to power and privilege but lose a piece of their own identity in the process. Recalling her experiences in the United States, she states, “When I tried to pass as white, or silently accepted the badge of honorary whiteness, I was trying to proclaim to our neighbors that I was Not Black, that I was Not Hispanic” (Sen 2018, 125). Sen articulates the moral and practical costs of allowing oneself to assimilate in the empire and, in ways akin to the seer’s call in Rev 18, encourages people like herself to set themselves

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1. I am grateful to Ekaputra Tupamahu for calling my attention to this book.

apart from white power structures. They are to seek identity not in opposition to those at the margins of power but by setting themselves apart from the immorality of corridors of power.

The movie *Mississippi Masala* illustrates the ways—explicit and subtle—in which many in the South Asian community tend to envision their identity as distinct from those of more marginalized communities and highlights the ways in which they reinforce whiteness. In the movie, Mina, a young woman born to Ugandan immigrants of South Asian origin but now living in Mississippi, falls in love with Demetrius, an African American carpet cleaner. Her family opposes the alliance vehemently due to class differences but primarily because of their racial animosity toward darker-skinned people. The movie depicts, at times starkly for effect, the polemic attitude of some Indian Americans from Uganda toward Africans and African Americans due to Idi Amin's expulsion of South Asians from the country. Although the movie depicts both sets of parents as opposing the alliance between Mina and Demetrius to varying degrees, the opposition on the part of Mina's parents stems from a desire to move away from blackness and, perhaps more importantly, toward whiteness. From their perspectives, moving away from blackness in pursuit of the center and whiteness is essential for their survival.

The movie underscores the hybrid location of South Asians that often translates into their two-faced stance toward race and mistreatment based on skin color. The two-faced stance consists of vocal critique of white racism in the United States, while simultaneously subjecting darker-skinned people to the same mistreatment and prejudice. Such a stance becomes more apparent in instances where many South Asians benefit from sociocultural and institutional structures that discriminate against other minoritized communities, while at the same time critiquing them if they happen to be at the receiving end. In the end, the couple runs away from Mina's family, making it a metaphor for turning their backs on her family's pursuit of whiteness and desire to embrace the center. The movie highlights the ways in which many within the South Asian community occasionally exhibit a tendency to replicate the oppressive structures they tend to criticize in the American cultural and political empire. As Bhabha might put it, that which parodies has an ambivalent attitude toward the object of its parody.

## Conclusion

Revelation 18 presents Rome's crisis as an opportunity for "my people" to seek transformation of existing structures of dehumanization (Yarbro

Collins 1984, 94). In times of crisis, the oppressed should come out of the empire in order to press for change and attenuate the power of the empire rather than treat crisis as an occasion to seek ways to merely secure their interests and maintain status quo. Accordingly, for “my people,” coming out is more than merely individual and extends into the corporate realm; it is an attempt on their part to undermine Rome and its economic structures, which depended on them for its profits. The seer moves the agency of transformation from the divine to the humans, positing the latter as catalysts who can effect change by refusing to participate in the empire. “My people” will be the instruments who will ultimately cause Babylon to fall.

The seer also posits coming out of the empire as a form of paying back to the empire in kind. The empire had mastered the art of co-opting other communities and employing them to carry out its agenda of oppression, while depicting itself as accommodating minoritized communities. The seer calls for “my people” to pull the rug from under the empire’s feet as an act of rewarding it for its agenda.

Asian American participation in the American empire has granted them access to power, but, akin to the relationship of “my people” with Rome, a continued complicity in the American empire might expose them to a deadly plague and undermine their self-interests. Asian Americans, South Asians in particular, are to examine the benefits, as well as costs, of aligning themselves with the empire and turning their backs on Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, immigrants, and sexual minorities. Again, as with Rome, their departure from the empire would be based not just on moral values but also on pragmatic considerations. To remain with and at the center is to be afflicted with a deadly plague, but to come out and side with the margins is to survive and even thrive.

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## The Pressures of Our Time: Reflections on Revelation 18 in the Light of Patriarchy, Fear, and Hope in a Postapartheid South Africa

Miranda N. Pillay

In *Comfort and Protest: The Apocalypse from a South African Perspective*, Allan Boesak (1987, 17; emphasis added) reminds us that a characteristic of literary works such as the Revelation of John is that they “reflect in the most dramatic way the response of the people of God to *pressures of their time*.” I understand Boesak’s reference to time in terms of what H. Richard Niebuhr (1941, 10–11) explains as “not abstract but particular and concrete; it is not a general category of time but rather the time of a definite society with distinct language, economic and political relations, religious faith and social organization.” The adage “times have changed” rings true—but often with a longing for the good old days. One such example has to do with the many internet sources, including social media and blogs, where some Christian South Africans openly express their despair about the changes in the country since the demise of the apartheid government. Indeed, a different time from when Boesak (1987, 91) and many South Africans experienced apartheid to be a “curse” and the cause of “deepest pain.”

The mid-1980s was a time when the majority of South Africans lived in fear, as the police were given carte blanche when the apartheid government declared a countrywide state of emergency. Regarded as a turning point in South African history, these years were marked by protest action against the apartheid government, to which the government responded with extreme brutality and repression, which was legitimized by the declaring of a state of emergency between 1985 and 1989. This was also a time when those South Africans who had the right to vote for the government of the day felt safe and cared for. Thus, the 1980s was a time when

Boesak and most South Africans found hope in Revelation as they reacted to the *pressures of their time* during apartheid. Today, when looking back, some (Christian) South Africans lament the fact that their political and religious leaders back then were disobedient to God's word (as revealed in the book of Revelation), because they gave in to fear and evil *pressures of that time*. Thus, the book of Revelation continues to serve as a source of *hope*, as different Christian communities claim divine inspiration to respond to the *pressures of their time*. For example, in 1987, the year Boesak's book appeared, the CB Powell Bible Centre at the University of South Africa organized a seminar on how to read the book of Revelation. The papers were published in 1988 in a book titled *Reading Revelation*. In one of the contributions, J. Roberts (1988, 34), with carefully chosen words, states, "Notwithstanding the vast span of time between the first century and the twentieth, one cannot but reflect that many Christians in this century also experience persecution by the state, and at the very least, suffering in some form or another because of this.... On the other hand, most twentieth-century Christians seem to live in comparative ease and relative peace with the state."

For Boesak (1987, 29), "Revelation is so relevant for us today" because John, in describing his own time, is "describing the times in which we live." Revelation remains relevant for many of the same reasons as those offered by Boesak over thirty years ago, because many South Africans continue to live in fear of violent crime, and the poor remain marginalized and vulnerable. As a South African Christian woman of color who was a youth in the 1970s—a time of intense struggle against apartheid—I have experienced despair in apartheid South Africa, and I have also witnessed hope anticipated at the dawn of a democratic South Africa. However, after years of democracy, many South Africans are yet to experience the freedom of which the country's constitution boasts, while many others perceive the freedom of others to have led to chaos and crisis in society. Some South Africans garner hope in this time of crises by appealing to the word of God as revealed to people to set things back.

In a document on *The Challenges of Post-apartheid South Africa*, the Africa Leadership Forum suggests that apartheid "is a human problem that has been sustained by fear, intimidation, falsity and oppression. A post-apartheid period must mean the elimination of all these" (Obasanjo 1993, n.p.). At this point, more than twenty-five years of democracy have elapsed in South Africa. What are the pressures at this point in time? How has Revelation shaped responses of the people of God over time in South Africa? What



danger might be lurking as Christians vie for God's favor based on divine revelation? Exploring these questions provides a backdrop before my turn to deal more directly with Rev 18. Listening to the conflicting voices "competing for control and acknowledgement as the authoritative voice" (Pippin 1992, 109) in a postapartheid South Africa, and within biblical scholarship, open a space for me in the interpretive battle of the Revelation of John.

I first sketch the relevance of divine revelation in a contemporary South African context. The purpose here is to illuminate the complexities and ambiguity of the *pressure of our time*. Second, it is helpful to explore how biblical discourses (text and interpretation) relating to the Revelation of John have in particular times in South African history been retrieved to direct (implicitly or explicitly) public discourse and practice.

### Echoes of Divine Revelation in a Postapartheid South Africa

Until recently, I dismissed as harmless the claims of individuals who, with sincere piety, profess that "the Lord has shown me," or who, with humble discernment, declare that "I'll wait upon the Lord to reveal to me." This I have done because in most cases such declarations serve to encourage, give hope, or provide comfort. What has raised my suspicion that claims of divine revelation may be cause for concern? Two keen examples from recent times come to mind.

The first has to do with Dr. HQ (Hamilton) Nala, the pastor of Rebirth Family Ministries and founder of Nala Mandate International. In April 2014, the *Daily News* reported that Nala had announced that, since the beginning of that year, "39 blind people had gained their sight by using 'faith water.'" Nala, the paper continued, "claims that his 'faith water' which costs R15 a bottle could cure many ailments—including AIDS" (Mbanjwa 2014). Nala, a self-proclaimed bishop who refers to himself as a "plentiologist," teaches that God will bless followers with abundant health and wealth if they obey the word as revealed to him. Through obedience to the revealed word, believers will be in a secure position to continue living with not only enough but also "in the world of plenty," says Nala. Followers believe that doing what the pastor instructs is being obedient to the word of God, which promises a life of abundance.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Other examples along these lines can be mentioned, such as those associated with the Synagogue Church of All Nations. In September 2014, the church made international news when a building collapsed, killing many worshippers who were attending

The second example concerns Angus Buchan, the founder and leader of the Mighty Men Conference. Buchan (1998) has claimed that he is acting on a mandate received from God to encourage men to take ownership of what God has given to them, including families, businesses, or farms, because God works to restore male dignity by breaking whatever bondages they have in their lives to set them free. Buchan was originally a Zambian maize and cattle farmer of Scottish descent who started farming in Zambia but was forced to sell everything and move to Greytown, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, in 1976, due to political unrest in Zambia. In 1980 he started Shalom Ministries, and in 2006 his 1998 book was turned into a film of the same title in 2006. Since its first gathering in 2004, on Buchan's Greytown farm in South Africa, the Mighty Men Conference movement has become an annual event, drawing tens of thousands of men. The movement teaches that "men taking ownership of their families"—as opposed to gender equality propagated by a "Godless" constitution—is a sign of their obedience to God, in which case God will entrust them with bigger responsibilities, such as control of the nation. This observation echoes the idea that the "rule of the fathers" has developed into a belief system where one social group exercises some form of dominion over another—extending into the political sphere of society (Coetzee 2001, 300). In apartheid South African society the legitimacy of the rule of the fathers in the political sphere was also shaped by its racist policies. Patriarchy then operates as a hypernorm, trumping all other norms (300).

The two examples above are representative of the complexity of a diverse and multivariant South African society, yet in both instances a "man of God" promises God's favor in exchange for obedience to God's

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a healing service. The claim that Pastor Joshua is a "wise" man who can cure almost any affliction, from madness to HIV/AIDS, draws thousands of followers from all over Africa and other parts of the world ("South Africa Says Death Toll in Nigeria Church Collapse Rises to 115" 2014). Years earlier, in 2011, the BBC News reported the death of three women after they had stopped taking their antiretroviral medication, because they had believed the pastor's word that only their faith in God would heal them. When approached by the BBC, the leadership of Synagogue Church of All Nations denied that they were healers, saying, "God is the healer. Never a sickness God cannot heal. Never a disease God cannot cure" (Dangerfield 2011). This reflects the harsh realities that sero-positive individuals who stopped medication have died because they had found hope in divinely revealed cures and divinely revealed words of an anointed pastor who promised that their HIV status would miraculously be reversed if they were obedient in their belief.

word in times of crises. Crisis rhetoric, says David deSilva (2008, 265) “amplifies the significance of challenges” or *pressures of a particular time*. Brisio J. Oropeza (2012, 179) notes, “Revelation employs what may be understood as the rhetoric of fear (cf. Rev. 11:18; 14:7; 15:4; 19:5) that encourages proper behavior through words and depictions highlighting the consequences of both the righteous and unrighteous.” When a speech or sermon is framed to address a crisis that warrants fear and claims that the crisis will be successfully survived, it may appear that the speaker is “offering advice out of pure rather than self-interested motives” (deSilva 2008, 265). In this regard, the authenticity and legitimacy of the speaker/preacher are important to ward off any objections that the speaker is “rash, violent or exclusive” (265).

With regard to crisis rhetoric in the Revelation of John, deSilva (2008, 264) notes that to some scholars (esp. Carey 2001), John constructs his own credibility by presenting his writing as revelation and prophecy. Also, in Revelation, John identifies with his audience as “your brother who shares with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance” (1:9), and with some admissions of weakness, error, and confusion (1:17; 5:4–5; 7:13–17; 17:7–8; 19:10; 22:8). In making connections among himself, the audience, and valued figures within the Jewish tradition, John builds connections with his audience. Furthermore, as some scholars point out, John’s appeal to Hebrew Scripture serves as a legitimating foundation for his own voice (deSilva 2008, 265), a point I take up below.

While there may be some merit in these views, I see some connections with the two South African examples cited above. In effect, both Nala and Buchan claim to have received a mandate/instruction from God, both appeal to Scripture in claiming their legitimacy to persuade their audiences and denounce their rivals, and both connect with their audiences in their common suffering. The promise of health, wealth, power, and dominion cited in these two examples gives hope in contexts of fear and despair. In the first example, (mainly black) South Africans are promised health and wealth if they believe in God’s word as revealed to their pastor. In the second example, (mainly white) South Africans are promised that God will restore order in society if men show obedience by taking up their God-given responsibility as head of the family. For many (if not all) of Buchan’s followers, South Africa’s societal problems are a result of societal changes post-1994. After its first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa embarked on a program to build a nonracist, nonsexist society. Sarojini Nadar (2009, 557) points to the crisis expe-

rienced by Afrikaner men because Afrikaner hegemonic masculinity is challenged in postapartheid South Africa. In this sense, the expression *hegemonic masculinity* refers to the dominant cultural perception of what it means to be a man in the eyes of God (see “White Patriarchy in South Africa” 2010).

Both examples lead me, therefore, to concur with Sharon Welch (1990, 112): “Although rituals and doctrines that affirm absolute power of God also claim that such power is had only by God, they also reinforce a human desire for absolute power, a dangerous desire for those who have political and economic power. The distinction between divine and human masks, but does not eliminate the valorization of absolute power.”

Nicolaas van Rensburg, the Seer

There is much talk in South Africa about the ability to claim and speak God’s favor by listening to God’s word as unveiled by certain pastors/leaders—past and present—who claim to have received an anointing from God to reveal God’s word. This is evident from browsing the many internet sites relevant to Revelation where many (mainly white) South Africans seem to find direction for the struggles of their time from Nicolaas van Rensburg, a Boer from South Africa who was known as “Siener”—Seer, “the messenger of God.”

The Bible was the only book Siener van Rensburg read, and his seemingly accurate predictions of future events from 1899 until his death in 1926 often entailed a kind of religious nationalism. Furthermore, many of his visions “resonant directly with the iconography and narratives of Revelations [*sic*]” (cited in Titlestad 2014, 62). While it is not my intention here to discuss to what extent van Rensburg’s visions may be compared to that of John in the book of Revelation or to explore the full scope of the Seer’s more than seven hundred visions, two of his visions are worth mentioning for my purposes.

The AIDS Pandemic

After a vision in December 1917, van Rensburg is reported to have said, “Immorality will increase throughout the world”; as a result of such immorality, moreover, he is said to have seen “how a disease broke out in Africa.” He told a close friend, “mainly blacks will die from it,” while “whites will be relatively untouched by it” (Jonathan 2014, 222). Today,

the AIDS pandemic is seen by some South Africans as a fulfillment of that vision (222). In the vision, moreover, van Rensburg also saw how “a little old Kaffir sits dressed in women’s clothing and dung rolls off him on the western side.” Jonathan (222–23) interprets the latter part of the vision to be a homosexual who spreads the disease “among the Western Nations.” Jonathan (222) also makes a point of explaining that, while *kaffir* was a “blanket term for black southern Africans ... the original meaning was *heathen*, *unbeliever* or *infidel* from the Arabic *kafir*.”

### South Africa as Safe Haven

With regard to the end times, van Rensburg writes: “I see a black curtain in the distant future. It will not be a bleak future for us who know. I see the hand of the Lord.... I see a new Republic. During the time of that new government the Lord will return and establish His Millennial reign on Earth, but also very big trouble will be upon the earth, and as a result many European refugees will flee to South Africa” (“The End of Days according to Farmer-Prophet Siener van Rensburg (1860–1927)” n.d.). According to Jonathan (2014, 238), “van Rensburg also indicated that the trouble for South Africa will be much shorter lived when compared to other countries also less troublesome, as the Lord will send His power and blessing causing South Africa to be a safe-haven for Christians from all over the world.” However, this safe haven comes to pass only after the “enemy” (interpreted as Blacks and Indians) are driven east (interpreted to be Durban, Kwazulu Natal), where they will “sound the retreat and leave the country ... never to return. The enemy is overcome!”

### Hope, Safety, Peace

A vision of hope—for whom? For those who are longing for the good old apartheid days of “order” and “peace”? Boesak (1987, 49) poignantly states that peace in apartheid South Africa was maintained by a system of racial hierarchy, where the labels *kaffirs* and *coloureds* forced many South Africans to “accept their sub-human status” and live according to their inferior status.

Moreover, when the divine revelation claimed by South African males (past and present) is linked to that of the last book in the Christian Bible, many hierarchies of power are sanctified. This can be readily seen from the following blog:

The Boer had failed in his purpose, which was to take the gospel of Jesus Christ into Africa. Instead, we took church and religion did our own thing and not His will. Jesus Christ will only return when His true church is restored as predicted in Haggai and elsewhere. To achieve that, we have to OBEY by leaving the organised church as commanded in Revelation 18. Jesus does not underwrite the denominations and sects but only a unified, true bride. (Pieter 2012)

A number of comments are in order. First, this quote—which clearly refers to the official white Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa and the apartheid regime as having been God-ordained—also echoes certain concerns that the Belhar Confession against apartheid (Kim n.d.) is not biblical and not “God’s will.” Second, today many (mainly white) South Africans see Buchan as the one mandated by God to restore Christ’s true church. Buchan teaches that through obedience—men to God and women to men—husbands will be affirmed as “men in charge,” and wives will be happy because their husbands are fulfilled and in control (Pillay 2011, 188). As Buchan’s wife, Jill, puts it: “The church of God needs men. They need fathers, they need everything *set back in order* because the church is still full of homes that are still struggling with headship and God says he’s going to sort out the church first. He has to re-instate the men, and when he does that, the women will be very happy” (cited in Nadar 2009, 556). The headship and kingship theology advocated by Buchan is reminiscent of the men’s movement founded in 1990 by Bill McCartney. One of the seven promises made by Promise Keepers relates to a man and his family and states, “A Promise Keeper is committed to building strong marriages and families through love, protection, and biblical values” (Pillay 2015, 64). Third, the specific reference to Rev 18 indicates a particular approach to interpreting Revelation: namely, the idealist method. Here Babylon is understood to refer to the institutional church as well as “all the wicked world systems” throughout history (Woods n.d., 3). This idealist method divorces Revelation from its particular contextual history in exchange for spiritual lessons or principles recurring throughout history (Hamstra 1988).<sup>2</sup>

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2. The idealistic approach is one of four generally identified in the interpretation of Rev 17–18. The others are as follows: (1) the preterist, which stresses the historical background of Revelation; (2) the futurist, which takes both what is seen to be and what is seen to be in the future into account; and (3) the historical view, which identifies the beast with Rome and the harlot Babylon with the apostate church (Tenney

What emanates from this observation is that the quest for the utopian ideal in a South African context involves a struggle against the wickedness of oppressive powers, whether such powers are seen as the wickedness of ordered, obedient apartheid ethos resulting from apartheid theology or the wickedness of sinful, disorderly, corrupt postapartheid ethos resulting from a liberal constitution. Either way, as Tina Pippin (1992, 58) observes, in desiring a utopian ideal the wickedness of gender oppression is overlooked. In a postapartheid context, gender hierarchy is presented as a God-ordained necessity for order, favor, and benevolence in a time of chaos, crisis, and despair.

Based on the argument made thus far, two conclusions are in order. The first has to do with the end of apartheid. What many South Africans have seen as a victory of "God's people" (Boesak 1987) over the evil of racial oppression, too many view as a loss of God's favor, due to the fact that certain apartheid government and church leaders have consorted with the enemy of God, namely, South Africans who have no regard for biblical values. The second concerns the pressures of our time, given that times have changed in a postapartheid South Africa. For the Black masses, such pressures remain the same, as (the politically) promised control, wealth, and well-being remain elusive. For many (Afrikaner) white South Africans, such pressures have to do with the challenge to their supremacy as custodians of God's order.

### The Struggle Continues: Theo-ethical Feminist Lenses

There is a general sense among many South Africans that victory over the oppressive hierarchy of apartheid (minority white over majority black) should be seen as an opportunity to address other hierarchies of power inherent in racism, classism, elitism, ageism, sexism, and so forth. However, with regard to sexism, some South Africans see it as their Christian duty to regroup forces and forge new alliances in order to retrieve and sanctify the rule of the fathers inherent in patriarchy in the

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1988, 135–46). For interpreters who employ the idealist method, Andy Woods (n.d., 3) explains, the oppressive power symbolized as Babylon refers to Rome as well as "all the wicked world systems" throughout history: "In the first century, Babylon was Rome. Two generations ago it was Berlin.... Babylon can be found everywhere throughout the history of the world. It is the center of anti-Christian seduction any time in history" (cited in Woods n.d., 8).



face of traditional African gender roles or white hegemonic masculinity under challenge in postapartheid South Africa.

After its first democratic elections, South Africa embarked on a program to build a nonracist, nonsexist society. Nelson Mandela (1994) set the course in his state of the nation address at the opening of the first democratically elected parliament:

It is vitally important that all structures of government, including the President himself, should understand this fully: that freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression. All of us must take this on board, that the objectives of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) will not have been realized unless we see in visible and practical terms that the condition of the women of our country has radically changed for the better, and that they have been empowered to intervene in all aspects of life as equals with any other member society.

However, many South Africans consider changes implemented in post-apartheid South Africa to be the cause of chaos and crises in South Africa. For many, the advocacy for gender equality is against biblical values and destroying families. For some, such advocacy subverts Afrikaner ideals, while for others it seeks to destroy African tradition. As former South African constitutional judge Albie Sachs so poignantly observes:

It is a sad fact that one of the few profoundly non-racial institutions in South Africa is patriarchy. Amongst the multiple chauvinisms which abound in our country, the male version rears itself with special and equal vigour in all communities. Indeed, it is so firmly rooted that it is frequently given a cultural halo and identified with the customs and personality of different communities. Thus, to challenge patriarchy, to dispute the idea that men should be the dominant figures in the family and society, is seen not to be fighting against male privilege but as attempting to destroy African tradition or subvert Afrikaner ideals or undermine civilized and decent British values. Men are exhorted to express their manhood as powerfully as possible. Patriarchy brutalizes men and neutralizes women—across the colour line. (Commission on Gender Equality 1998, 10)

Sachs's concerns about patriarchy, raised more than twenty years ago, continue to be embodied by a divinely driven element of revelation exhibiting certain discursive themes, including the idealization of a traditional,



heterosexual, male-headed type of family and the reconstitution of traditional gender-based family roles. In a sense, this drive also holds socio-ethical and religious concerns. There is a notion that, as in biblical times, God addresses men with a clear call for men to obey God's word, as it is God's "intention" to reinstate men to take charge of family, church, and society (Pillay 2011, 188).

Daniël Louw (2009, 99) notes that patriarchal hierarchy is underpinned by four interlocking justifications: (1) biological: male physical strength is part of intended natural law; (2) cultural: families and societies are naturally based on aggression, domination, procreation, and spouse and child protection; (3) economic: property, production, and distribution of goods are the natural domain of men; and (4) religious: male superiority, dominance, and privilege are part of received religious revelation. Not surprisingly, the retrieval of patriarchy as a hypernorm is understood to be in accordance with God's word as revealed to certain men. When patriarchy is sanctified, it dominates all other norms and relativizes all other power relations in society (Coetzee 2001, 300). Thus, as mentioned before, the elevation of the idea of rule of the fathers has developed into a belief system, where one social group exercises dominion over another and extends into the political sphere of society. In this sense, patriarchy serves as a "hypernorm" (300). Coetzee (300) notes that the idea of patriarch as the father and ruler of the family and tribe was first used in biblical times, while that of the father as head and protector of the family is a legacy of the Afrikaner volk.

For many (mainly white) South Africans, the call from Buchan and his Mighty Men Conference is not only to retrieve the supremacy of the father but also to extend that supremacy to other spheres of society and dominate all other forms of social arrangement—particularly the racial hierarchy inherent in apartheid ideology and theology.

For many black South Africans, a divine revelation, calling for obedience to a particular pastor's or leader's gift of restoring health and wealth, is appealing. This is especially true for those for whom disease and poverty continue to be pressures of their (changing) time. If being obedient to what God has revealed is all it takes to be showered with God-promised health and dominion, who is to argue against the hope such promises hold? This question reflects a reductionist view upheld by a warped sense of reality, which in essence is coercive. When patriarchy is given a holy halo by Scripture, it is interpreted as being benevolent toward women. Yet, as I have argued, patriarchy is sanctified by both a cultural and a religious halo in the South African context.

According to *Culture, Religion and Gender: A Training Manual for the Media* (2002, 16), “Recently, there has been a rise in conservative or fundamentalist religious movements, often associated with conservative nationalism or right-wing politics. These movements are generally opposed to the concept of gender equality.” Furthermore, Tinyiko Maluleke (2009, 31) observes that many African male theologians who have been dealing with issues of oppression and exclusion in apartheid South Africa are slow in recognizing issues of dehumanizing, oppression, and exclusion operative in patriarchy. “African theology,” says Maluleke (33; see also Pillay 2012; 2015) “has remained largely beholden to the supremacist ideas when it comes to gender relations,” and “patriarchy speaks to the supremacy of the male.”

### Feminist Calls for a Shift

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1983, 32–35) argues for shifting one’s focus from seeking liberating canonical texts to a process of biblical interpretation that can grapple with oppressive as well as liberating functions of particular texts in women’s lives and struggles. For her, a hermeneutic of suspicion scrutinizes the presuppositions and interests of interpreters and biblical commentators as well as the androcentric strategies of the biblical text itself. As Musimbi Kanyoro (2002, 9) states, “All interpretations bear the bias of the interpreters” and, because culture is central to people’s thought systems, cultural hermeneutics helps one see how “culture conditions people’s understanding of reality at a particular time and location.”

These observations point to the fact that one’s reading of biblical texts is influenced by the prevailing socioeconomic-political climate in specific contexts. The Bible’s use to legitimize slavery, racism, sexism, and other discriminatory and exploitative perceptions and practices is now widely acknowledged and documented. In South Africa’s political history of the recent past, apartheid was justified theologically by particularly the “white” Dutch Reformed Church (Pillay 2009). Thus, says Von Thaden (2015, 108), “texts are repurposed, corralled, and coerced into new contexts.” Von Thaden (108) notes also that “the important issue is to identify what *people* do with the texts, rather than assume passive communities upon whom the texts act,” and agrees that the question, “‘who has (re)used this text, how, and for what purpose’ identifies more clearly the particular interpreters and agendas behind these reinterpretations.”

This is why South African New Testament scholar Elna Mouton calls for serious and prayerful reflection and accountability on *what* text we read, *how* we read a particular text, and *why* we read a particular text. Particularly, because we, as South Africans, have witnessed how the Bible has been (ab)used to oppress—but also to liberate (Mouton 2011, 280). Mouton (2011) identifies three broad hermeneutical positions with regards to the reading of Scripture by women: (1) adhering to texts uncritically as timeless truths and blueprint for all times and places in ways that justify subservience and often silence the role of women in church and society; (2) rendering certain texts, or the Bible as a whole, as inappropriate, androcentric in nature, and not liberative to women; and (3) aiming to reread texts in order to retrieve transformative and liberative potential of texts. In the same vein, Annika Thiem (2014, 35–56) poignantly argues that we can offer alternative, liberative readings to oppressive biblical texts and interpretations all we want, but we will not be able to bring about real change if we ignore the biblical discourses that have long shaped the sensibilities and values that determine and justify oppressive public practices.

In other words, biblical discourses—shaped by selected biblical texts, particular modes of interpretation, and authority being granted to certain interpreters—have, over a long period of time, presented Christians with a set archive of normative bodies, desires, and affects that have become encoded “into our social practices and institutions” (Thiem 2014, 36). Thus, due to inculturation and the internalization of *habitus*, women (and other oppressed groups) do not see the inferior status imposed on them by hierarchies of power (Bird 2011, 25).

This internalization of patriarchy and patriarchal violence is why so many women defend this positional power and stay in abusive relationships (Pillay 2013, 57; Kretzschmar 1998). Nadar (2009, 556; cf. Pillay 2013, 58) explains that such lived realities justify “palatable patriarchy,” which is maintained and perpetuated through positional power and discursive power. Therefore, I concur with Jennifer Bird (2011, 43), who insists on the importance of addressing the “genderedness of power” of biblical texts, since power defines how communities are structured and function. In the case of Buchan’s Mighty Men Conference, God will endow men with power over many other things if they take charge of their wives, while wives are commanded to be obedient to their husbands for the greater good of family and society. Men are charged to fear the word of God, and women are charged to fear God by acknowledging, maintaining, supporting, and defending their husbands’ divinely appointed status.

Gender is a major social, psychological, cultural, historical, and political category that affects the life choices of women and men in all communities (Belenky et al. 1986, 4). Feminist insights provide a prophetic discourse that contributes to a hermeneutic of interruption to oppressive Christian theologies. These insights and women's movements, such as the Black Sash (see Chubb 2009, 19) and the 1956 march of South African women of all races, have contributed to the greater liberation movement in South Africa and the subsequent dismantling of apartheid. Elsewhere I have noted that, despite these contributions, feminist insights continue to be ignored or dismissed through what Mary Daly calls trivialization, particularization, spiritualization, or universalization (Pillay 2013, 63–64; cf. Daly 1973, 4–6).

### A Multidimensional Hermeneutical Approach

Though steeped in feminist theology in my reading of biblical texts, I adopt a multidimensional hermeneutical approach called sociorhetorical interpretation to bring together insights gained from various approaches to biblical interpretation (Pillay 2008, 21–27). According to Robbins (1992, xxiv), a particular goal of sociorhetorical interpretation is to integrate rhetorical and anthropological modes of interpretation. Thus, both the narrational and social dimensions of language in texts are important. Robbins explains, “Interpreters are practicing many multiple approaches, but they are often practicing them either without knowledge of one another or in contexts where animosity is articulated with an absence of profound interrelation between the respective projects and their results” (xxiv). That is to say, when interpreters focus on one particular approach to the exclusion of others, the results are limited; when these approaches are used interactively, the results are richer and reflective of a (more) responsible reading (Robbins 1996, 2; Pillay 2008; Von Thaden 2015).

As a feminist theologian, I also share the view of various liberation theologies and ethics that paying attention to the specifics of social location is relevant to “how we know and what we know” (O’Connor 1995, 54). As a member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, I do theology from the basis of my lived experiences. Mercy Amba Oduyeye (2001, 16), founder of the circle, puts it this way:

In their theological reflections, women of the Circle proceed from the narrating of the story to analyzing it to show how the various actors in

the story see themselves, how they interact with others, and how they view their own agency in life as a whole.... The next stage is to reflect on the experiences from the perspective of the Christian faith—a conscious implementation of biblical and cultural hermeneutics are [*sic*] at work in this process.

Considering the multidimensional nature of women's experiences with regard to race, class, age, ability, sexuality, and so on, as raised within third-wave feminism, the circle calls for recognition of the full humanity of women and men. This is also a central feature of Christian feminism: it is committed "not just to the liberation of women, but to the liberation of men also" (Storkey 1985, 163; cf. Pillay 2013, 60).

For this reason, "African women's theologies include men in the vision and struggle for African liberation from all forms of oppression" (Phiri 2004, 17). As a South African Christian woman, I find feminist theology with its primary roots in liberation theology helpful. As a South African feminist theologian puts it:

When the private and corporate pain of sexist oppression is reflected on critically and systematically in the light of faith, feminist theology is born. It endeavours to challenge the church, to recognize the distortions of the Christian message created in the church's patriarchal socialization, and to reconstruct its social patterns, language and theology to affirm the full humanity of both women and men. (Ackermann 2003, 33)

Thus, my reading and my reflections are grounded in a feminist biblical hermeneutic and embedded in an interdisciplinary rhetoric of enquiry. Such a rhetoric, according to Schüssler Fiorenza (2013, 138), brings together "textuality, society, religion and politics" and "is concerned with how knowledge is constructed, the way individuals and groups wield power, and the values and visions biblical discourses engender."

As a feminist and African woman theologian, I am intentional about seeing ideological texture as exhibited as one of five textures of texts. I also see, however, that each one of the other textures—inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, sacred texture (Robbins 1996; Pillay 2008)—is embedded in the ideological texture of the author and the interpreter, and their contexts. In seeing ideology as the cultural world people inherit, one becomes aware of the fact that this world is imposed on groups through material practice, which is governed by a variety of factors, including the institutional structure; ritual, custom, authority

lines, and so forth (Weiler 1988, 7; cf. Pillay 2013). This also echoes Alice Jardine's description of ideology as "the conceptual glue of culture, that which makes culture seem natural, that which holds any cultural system together, that which, in fact, makes any system of relationships appear natural" (cited in Pippin 1992, 98).

My reading into the ideological texture of a text includes, therefore, a materialist critique of biblical texts. This involves "addressing the power struggles within and behind the text, seen in the "irruption or fabric of a narrative: which the text allows women to know" (Bird 2011, 58). In this case, where positional power shapes discursive power, I find insights gained from postcolonial studies helpful in discerning ideological texture. If *apocalypse* refers to the (imperial) triumph of the Kings of kings over evil forces in general and to the replacement of the harlot Babylon (Rev 18) with the bride, the new Jerusalem (Rev 21), in particular, then the question of whether it is not a matter of replacing one dominant power with another becomes an important one in a postapartheid context (Moore 2006). This observation also sparks another important and urgent socio-political issue: xenophobic violence in South Africa.

### Revelation 18: The Tension of Hope and Fear

In my initial reading of Rev 18 for this study, it was the shouts of victory that struck me: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great!" (Rev 18:2). This divine revelation of triumph, as pronounced by an angel from heaven (18:1), is followed by a call from another heavenly voice (presumably God) to obey: "Come out of her, my people" (18:4a). Victory over personified evil is promised to those who obey (18:4b). This divine revelation of destruction (fear) and divine promise (hope) based on obedience forms the backdrop against which I offer a reading of Rev 18.

In the opening verse of Rev 18, the splendor of the angel illuminates the earth (18:1) to expose Babylon, the mother of the abominations of the earth (17:5). Thus, while Rev 18 may be treated as a literary unit in itself, the initial vision of Babylon in Rev 17 has to be considered (Bauckham 1993, 340). Adela Yarbro Collins (1977, 250) sees 17:1–19:10 as a major literary section of the book of Revelation. In my reading of Rev 18, I found it necessary to refer to other parts of the book as well.

I am particularly concerned with the divine feminization of the evil (the idolatrous behavior) of Babylon, personified as "the mother of whores" (17:5) in Revelation. When I mentioned this to a colleague who is an Old

Testament scholar, he quipped, “Come on—there’s nothing sinister! All cities in Scripture are referred to in the feminine!” Marion Carson (2011, 223), in her effort to discount feminist interpretation of Rev 18, also notes this observation when she argues that, because the word *city* is a feminine noun in the Hebrew language, Rome is described as feminine, and “not because of any misogynistic intent.” Babylon, portrayed as a prostitute, has its roots in traditional Jewish imagery, she goes on to explain, and adds that in Ezek 16:15–58 the corrupt city (Jerusalem) is also portrayed as a woman “who has been given great advantages and riches by Yahweh and has begun to trust in herself” (223).

This made me think about the violence that accompanied the conquest of cities throughout the Old Testament and in Revelation, where the city to be conquered is most probably Rome, the city of evil imperial power, which will be destroyed in one hour (Rev 18:10; 17:19). Cities are conquered by men in the name of empire (God, king, Pharaoh, or Caesar), and the people are subsequently subjugated. Men enter cities and stake their claim as conquerors over people (which includes the rape of women) and territory. The envisioned good city is the new Jerusalem, the one taken as a bride by the Lamb (Rev 21).

Personally, I have always seen Revelation as a confusing, complicated book stuck at the end of the New Testament, rather dislocated from the gospel message and also questionable as an appropriate bookend to Christian Scripture. Perhaps this is because the only sermons I have heard preached on Revelation were ones that proclaimed doom for those who did not obey the word. The last sermon I heard preached on Revelation was in November 2005, at the occasion of my mother’s funeral. The following is a summary of the sermon, which was based on Rev 12:13–13:1:

Like the woman with a crown on her head, our mother too has the crown of salvation and is safe—because she was an obedient, faithful servant. She [our good mother] escaped the devil’s reach, but a clear warning rang out to her children, because, with the dragon in violent pursuit (12:17), we must remember to be steadfast in our faith and be obedient to the Word, our only hope. The dragon is always lying in wait (13:1).

Of course, when I now read Revelation through feminist theo-ethical lenses, I see that the woman remains in the wilderness forever—or perhaps not, if the (eschatological) hope is in the promise, “See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work” (Rev 22:12). Then, of course, the woman’s worth is in her womb (Pillay 2009) and not



included in the 144,000 virginal male followers of the Lamb. Moreover, as Pippin (1992, 75–80) points out, the woman in Rev 12 is productive (has done something) only because she was reproductive, and “the mother archetype is that the female as sexual being is affirmed only in the act of giving birth.” While the mainstream interpretation reads the 144,000 as representative of all believers who hold to God’s truth (Pippin 2012, 630), it is this argument, I believe, that makes male headship embedded in patriarchal sexism so palatably holy for some Christian women.

This is the push-and-pull in Revelation—fear and hope. Right at the beginning of the book, each of the seven churches reads/hears from Christ the warnings and the promises that hold fear and hope in tension with the echoing mantra, “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” John puts these words repeatedly (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) on the lips of Christ, leaving no doubt about the authority of his writing. After all, they have heard a similar call by Jesus according to Matthew (11:15; 13:9; 13:43), according to Mark (4:9; 4:23), and according to Luke (8:8; 14:35). The repetitive texture of Revelation also echoes the intertexture of the early Christian tradition.

A second repeated direct address in Revelation to the readers/hearers is, “Here is a call for the endurance and faithfulness of the saints” (Rev 13:10c; 14:12). If one considers the sociopolitical context in which Revelation was written, that of suffering under the then–ruling power (Roman), it is not surprising that John’s particular “use of holy war tradition would inevitably advocate or reinforce a position on the issue of resistance and violence to be adopted by its readers” (Yarbro Collins 1977, 246–47). However, Yarbro Collins (247) does state that John uses the holy war imagery in such a way “as to encourage a passive acceptance of suffering in the eschatological conflict.” So too Carson (2011, 220) notes the possibility that Revelation “does not encourage divinely sanctioned violence” but patient endurance instead.

What I also notice is that the call for the readers/hearers’ patient endurance is an association with John’s own experience of “persecution” and “patient endurance” (Rev 1:9). John, of course, was writing at a time when followers of the departed Christ are grappling with real-life issues, not the least of which is persecution of Christians by the ruling Roman empire (Oropeza 2012). This was a sociopolitical-ideological context of John’s reminder that Christians ought not forget their promised destiny in Christ, who would come soon. This explains his drawing on Old Testament imagery to give hope in light of the delayed parousia.



DeSilva (2008) shows how viewing the text from this particular angle of intertexture sheds light on John's use of the Old Testament. First, by invoking the traditionally received conviction that God is committed to judge all people, John wants his readers/hearers to see the judgment when Christ returns as the real crisis for which they have to prepare (and not be lured by the wonder of the whore who sits on the beast). In this way, the emotion of fear is invoked. Second, by recontextualizing certain familiar Old Testament hymns and prayers (e.g., Rev 15:3–4; 16:5–7) that affirm God's judgment as true and just on behalf of God's people and against God's enemies, John provides his audience with hope. Third, John employs intertexture (particularly the exodus tradition) to provide historical proof that "since God had once before worked terrible plagues to deliver God's people, God could plausibly do so again" (deSilva 2008, 280). So too by depicting Babylon as a whore to label the evil of Rome, John provides "another innovative way to adduce an historical precedent," which functions as a "previous verdict" that assures the "verdict of the heavenly court upon Babylon's newest manifestation," Rome (280–81).

In terms of classical rhetoric, Revelation represents a "narrative elaboration, in essence, of prognostication," and, as such, Revelation sketches consequences of future courses of actions by describing graphically the encouragement or deterrent of either worshiping God or following the beasts (deSilva 2008, 279). In this regard I see hope as an incentive to worship God and fear as a disincentive to follow the beasts.

#### She Who Sits on a Scarlet Beast

"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great!" (Rev 18:2). Babylon has appeared on three previous occasions, which exhibits repetition of the inner texture of the text. The first instance follows the description of cosmic conflict (14:8). The second comes at the climax of God's anger, as Babylon is given a cup filled with the wine of the fury of God's wrath (16:19). The third instance presents Babylon as a figure of splendor (17:5), as John, the narrator, "relates a marvelous feeling on encountering the Whore of Babylon" (Pippin 1992, 57): "When I saw her, I was greatly amazed" (17:6b). The NIV renders this verse as, "When I saw her, I was greatly astonished," while the KJV has, "When I saw her, I wondered with great admiration." Here, again, John identifies and connects with his readers/hearers' weakness by admitting to his own. The authoritative voice of the angel averts the narrator's attraction to the "woman sitting on a scarlet beast" (17:3) when the

mystery is explained. This explanation, however, does not provide a key to the puzzle of the mystery of “Babylon the Great, the mother of whores and of earth’s abominations” who is “sitting on a scarlet beast” (17:3, 5).

I disagree with Michael Wilcock (1975, 162), who reasons that the beast and the woman form a single mystery. Instead, I find Bauckham’s (1993, 343) view more plausible, when he explains that the beast and the woman are two major, complementary images of the evil power of Rome. I also agree with Carson (2011, 224), albeit for different reasons, that the significance of the beast should not be ignored, that the beast (masculine) “allows the woman to sit in authority,” and that it is the beast’s “evil power which drives and controls her.” The beast (masculine) will be admired by those whose names have not been written in the book of life (17:8); it will also turn against and hate the woman/Babylon (17:16).

The beast, together with the ten horns—the token kings who have no kingdoms but who give their power to the beast—make war against the Lamb. However, the Lamb, who is the King of all kings, will overcome them (17:14). Then, of course, this conquest means that the beast and the token kings become loyal subjects of the King of kings, and thus it is no surprise that they will hate Babylon, the whore (17:16). The violence that ensues is heart-wrenching, as they—the beast and the ten horns—leave the woman naked, consume her flesh, and then burn what is left! This ghastly act happens in order to fulfill God’s purpose (17:17). Then, almost as an afterthought, the explanation given by the angel follows: “The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth” (17:18).

The dynamic tension between hope and fear in Revelation is noted by Pippin (1992, 19–20), who illuminates the patriarchal politics at work in the text. The mother in Rev 12—a good, virtuous, nurturing woman—is good and worthy to be safe and protected, and the Bride in Rev 19 is pure and worthy to be entered. However, the whore in Rev 18 is evil and must be avoided or left behind—“Come out of her” (18:4)—if one is to avoid punishment and destruction (Pippin 1992, 78). “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great!” So begins the warning and accusation (18:1–3), which is followed by a warning, “Come out of her, my people” (18:4–8), a woe oracle of judgment (18:9–20), and the announcement of and reason for judgment (18:21–25; see Moloney 2015, 3–5). This fearful warning is followed by hope, “Hallelujah” (Rev 19:1). Thus, in its doom and fear, Rev 18 is a prophecy that gives hope to those who are obedient—those who do not desire the prostitute, do not wonder at her beauty, do not admire her power, and do not consort with her.

Hate speech echoes throughout Rev 18. Babylon deserves a double portion of her own cup (18:6), because she does not know her place, as does a dependent, needy widow. She sits instead as a queen—independent and powerful. Thus, she deserves to be judged, conquered, devoured, and burned (18:7–8). The kings of the earth who “committed fornication and lived in luxury with her” (18:9) mourn her death, because they are terrified that her sudden demise (in one hour) is also the destruction of their wealth, prestige, and lifestyle of luxury, which are guaranteed and sustained by her/Babylon’s influence and power (18:9–19). Philip Hughes (1990, 193) notes that the bitter lamentation of the kings of the earth at losing their pleasure and treasure is a summary of Ezek 27 concerning Tyre and her merchandise. The lamentations of the merchants of the earth match those of the kings of the earth, as they witness in horror the spectacle of Babylon’s destruction (18:15–19). While the kings bemoan the end of their power and status, the merchants bemoan “loss of trade in costly and luxurious commodities that has been the source of their wealth” (Hughes 1990, 194).

### On Flirting with Patriarchy

Carson (2011, 220) sets out to discredit feminist readings that portray Babylon, the whore, as a victim of violence, because they “could encourage violence toward women in general, and prostitutes in particular.” Yet, she agrees that Rev 18 has led some to believe that it is their responsibility to “kill the whore” in order to protect contemporary society against this epitome of evil (220). She does consider that (as she describes it) the “whore of Babylon” seems to correspond with the literary trope of “The Great Bitch,” who is a deadly female and worthy to be destroyed by the “omnipotent hero,” because the whore is both desirable and repulsive in her “desirous, greedy, powerful and clever” disposition (222). She further considers that John first flirts with her as an idea, after which she has to be destroyed, so that order may be restored, “an order in which the ideal woman is purity of the Bride of Christ” (222; cf. Bauckham 1993, 339).

Despite this observation, Carson (2011, 222) argues for a more “nuanced description” of the whore in Revelation, which “need not be seen as demonstrating unmitigated misogyny.” Her reason is that the beast and the whore represent both the masculine and the feminine power of evil in Revelation. Furthermore, Carson argues that John is “unafraid” to illustrate wickedness, including “a male ‘fantasy’ of the rape and killing of

a woman" (222). However, Carson is oblivious to her own observation that the beast "*allows* the woman to sit in authority" and that it is the beast's "evil power which *drives and controls her*" (224, emphasis added). Neither does Carson consider that even if John did not have misogynist intentions (given that the author was a man of his time, when respect for peace and order as maintained by the rule of the father at home [*paterfamilias*] was extended to the public sphere), the text of Revelation may still exhibit sexist notions inherent in a patriarchal society.

Carson (2011, 225) accuses Pippin and others who employ a feminist hermeneutic of being "unsophisticated readers" who have misread the text by making the whore in Revelation "into a real woman—a woman who dies at the hands of a male" (God?). Carson's (patronizing) gripe is that the approach of feminist scholars to Rev 17–18, such as Pippin's "well-meaning" interpretation, could contribute to the "stigmatization of prostitutes amongst Christians" (222). However, if, as Carson herself points out, the Christian canon exhibits many "clear instructions against associating with prostitutes," then whatever Pippin and other feminist scholars have done to illuminate and challenge the dichotomy of "the good/dependent woman versus the bad/independent woman" as a pervasive dominant cultural texture of Rev 17–18 could also serve to challenge the stigmatization of prostitutes in the same way that it serves to challenge the valorization of gender-based violence and oppressive gender power relations (221).

Carson (2011, 223) cites Schüssler Fiorenza's warning that the troublesome nature of biblical texts such as Rev 18 must be acknowledged in order to develop "a responsible hermeneutic" and that one should not lose sight of the "misogynist elements" in the use of the whore image. Yet, despite acknowledging the dualism in Revelation of a seductive whore whose power leads to fear versus the pure bride of Christ, whom one should enter, Carson focuses her own reading of Rev 18 only on Schüssler Fiorenza's observation that when the historical context is taken into account, it becomes "evident that Revelation is [primarily] about the liberation of believers who are at the mercy of a greedy and ruthless state" (219, 225; cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 1985). Based on this precept, Carson (2011, 222) finds feminist readings of Revelation to be limiting if not inadequate and observes that "in Hebrew biblical tradition the image of whoredom depicts the active pursuit of a permissive and indulgent lifestyle which is not congruent with Judaism." It is because of this idolatry, Carson continues, that the whores in the prophetic literature are seen to be "driven by the desire to sustain a lifestyle characterized by self-aggrandizement and satisfaction

rather than worshipping God" (223). While this may be true in the case of John's allusion to and echoing of Hebrew texts, it begs the questions: Why are such idolatrous images of whoredom pinned on women? Why are men seen as mere victims of the whore? More importantly, why are disobedience and attempts toward independence and autonomy by women seen as idolatrous whoredom?

While Carson sees metaphor and imagery as keys to understanding Babylon's destruction, I agree with Cheryl Exum that women, according to the text's gender ideology, are dangerously evil when powerful. Such is the androcentric agenda of the text—that women, though portrayed as powerful and dangerous, are yet subject to control by men (Exum 1993, 87). In Revelation, the agency of the three women—the mother (Rev 12), Babylon the whore (Rev 17–18), and the bride of the Lamb (Rev 21)—is negotiated by males.

I fail to see the need for Carson (2011, 226), who cites insightful feminist interpretations of Rev 18, to discredit such interpretations in order to make her point: contemporary human sex trafficking is not about misogynistic lust (of male clients) but rather about the greed of traffickers "whose sole objective is to make as much money [as quickly] as they can." Perhaps not many people would disagree with Carson, just as many South Africans would not disagree with Buchan, who serves a palatable patriarchy masked as God's benevolence toward women, and not many South Africans would argue with Nala, who pronounces healing of any disease that includes selling holy water to cure AIDS in God's name.

In making her argument against the human greed of traffickers, Carson continues to slate feminist interpretations of Rev 18 for focusing on gender and misogyny. These interpretations, she says, "lead to the idea that all women are blameless" and "always the victim of male violence and power games" (Carson 2011, 226). These views, for Carson, not only result in drawing attention away from the fact that men and boys are also trafficked into sex trade, but they "also ignore the fact that women too, like the whore in the passage" (Rev 18), can be so obsessed with the idea of power and wealth, "that they can and do become perpetrators themselves" (226). Although Carson is correct about sex trafficking and the way some women wield power (which usually is a male privilege), she ignores that "patriarchy's reliance on two highly effective strategies to assert its control over women; You can threaten them and they'll give in. You can bribe them, and they'll give in" (Exum 1993, 87). While Carson's (2011, 224) argument that Babylon the whore is not "entirely an innocent victim"

because she has indulged in and valued luxury, wealth, and power, may be valid, she does not take into account that the beast's benevolence toward allowing her to sit in a position of power may be conditional.

Why Carson's argument depends on negating feminist interpretations beats me! Perhaps it is because, as I have pointed out elsewhere, feminist views that focus on liberative and just practices toward women are often dismissed by universalizing a problem: to universalize the problem is to argue that women have nothing to complain about, because they are not the only ones who suffer. Everyone suffers in this world—men also suffer. This universalizing of suffering is, in my view, the tactic used to defend patriarchy, especially the view that men suffer an identity crisis regarding what it means to be a man (Pillay 2013, 64). Carson also appears to particularize feminist interpretations of Rev 18. By particularizing the problem as being created by "those feminists" who misread the text, Carson is playing the academic power game by discrediting one hermeneutical approach in favor of another. Why does it have to be either/or and not both/and?

### Concluding Remarks: Come Out! Come In!

The Apocalypse is determined to keep the dream of God alive for God's people. It is a protest against and a call for resistance to evil.

—Alan Boesak, *Comfort and Protest*

Uncertainty prevails in a context of crisis. In Revelation, uncertainty calls for a decision to come out of Babylon in fear of everlasting destruction. Those who have ears to heed the warning will also hear the Spirit of the bride say, "Come!" (Rev 22:17). The bodies of women are the site of struggle, whether to instill fear or give hope, in whatever manner of speaking/reading. To trump greed as idolatry over the pervasive (if not explicit) patriarchal ethos of the text is to be blind to the ideological texture as well as the social-cultural thread of intertexture which Revelation exhibits. To illuminate and challenge patriarchy in biblical texts such as Rev 18 is not to accuse biblical narrators of misogyny. Rather, such interpretations seek to illuminate culturally inherited and deeply rooted gender bias. When patriarchy is given a holy halo in times of crisis, it becomes powerful but problematic tool for manipulation.

As South Africans, we have come a long way since Boesak's passionate grapple with the beast of apartheid. Twenty some years into a new democratic South Africa, the struggle continues for the poor and diseased. While

women hold leadership positions in parliament, business, and church, not much has changed; women continue to work within the patriarchal structures of these organizations. This, together with a halo endowed by claims of divine revelation and culture, contribute to the triumph of patriarchy. Maybe this is the struggle of our time over all the ages, and maybe if our complicity and culpability in the triumph of patriarchy are seen to be the father of evil idolatry, other oppressive hierarchies of power will hang in the balance.

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## Engagement

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Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder

I offer the following reflection through a womanist maternal lens. In this regard I examine texts and the contexts that produce them through the framework of race, class, sex, and motherhood. The triangulation of racial status, economic standing, and gender presentation through the prism of African American mothering provides a hermeneutical grounding. Herein are the seeds that bear my interpretive fruit.

Before they go to school, I remind my children to say their prayers. One line says, “Help us to practice self-discipline, self-control, and self-regulation.” They are asking God to help them do no harm, to consider when responding to anyone trying to harm, and to do what they are supposed to do. I admit I do not ask them to pray for self-deportation. Roberto Mata begs me to reconsider. Maybe there are some situations and some people from which my children need to excuse themselves, to self-deport.

Mata’s work presents a novel appropriation of geopolitics and othering in this apocalypse as that which can resonate with current immigration-border-other politics in the United States. While so much media attention centers on “building a wall to keep them out” and on coerced deportation, little if any scrutiny in the public square or within theological circles lifts the idea that our Hispanic siblings may choose to leave the United States.

Nonetheless, Mata posits that there is peril and hardship for Latinx persons, *Los Atravesados*, entering these imperial borders of the United States. So much so that like Others in Revelation, such liminal border existence becomes a place of resistance and negotiation. The others could retreat, but they decide to stay and fight.

I want my children to understand that there is right and wrong. Yet, there are areas in between. When laws are unjust and unfair, there is a moral authority that lend itself to countering bad legality for good humanity. Life

is filled with spaces of liminality. Mata helps us see that the middle can be good ground for fighting the good fight.

Raj Nadella focuses on the phrase “my people” to expound on what it means to relish in the center while dwelling in the margins. “My people” have an advantage while on the receiving end of socially disadvantageous injustice. The center has its benefits even if the same people on the periphery reap its goodness.

There is a double consciousness or what Nadella refers to as “ambivalence” that places one in a both/and locus. As an African American mother, I have universal experiences due to my maternal status. Yet the color of skin can make me an object of racial policing and microaggressions. I am a part of the in-group while still subject to outsider status. I can have gains while at the same time suffer loss because of this dual and dueling existential reality.

Akin to Mata’s liminality, any degree of ambivalence should still be a point of departure for countering imperial forces. Liminality is not a locus of stagnation, but an ontological war room for developing strategies against the empire. The center allows a view from all sides; the outside renders a gaze away from the fray. Both perspectives are required to defeat political regimes. I lift my voice for fellow mothers. I pray with my feet for my African American people.

My grandmother used to say, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” I could not help but think of this adage while reading Miranda N. Pillay’s contribution. Pillay helps the reader to see that while apartheid is no longer in existence, there are postapartheid “pressures of our time.” Expounding on the push-pull of fear and hope in Revelation, Pillay highlights a tension between what was and what is. There is a need to move from the past, but there are remnants that tailor the present. One wants to hope, but fear hovers above and around.

As an African American mother, I want the best education and hence the most efficient opportunities for my children. What I do for them is wedded to my hope for their future. Nevertheless, a tangible fear lingers like a formidable storm cloud. No matter what schools and programs my children attend and despite where they live, their African American presence is perceived to be dangerous or less-than. This is the push-pull of my womanist maternal hope and fear.

Pillay maintains that, while South African society has moved beyond apartheid, there is a postapartheid struggle connected to the former way of life. The pressures of our current time cease to yield to the pressures of the

past time. Hope wants to and perhaps needs to prevail; yet, fear will not go away. It holds on to hope kicking and screaming.

In a move similar to Nadella and Mata, Pillay sheds light on what it means to live in an interim space. Whether, as Nadella posits, we are “ambivalent,” or, as Mata avers, there is “border negotiation,” existing in the middle is not a place of facility or inactivity. On the contrary, it is solid ground for regrouping, recontextualizing, and challenging the powers that be and the powers that were.

As an African American mother, existence is the middle ground of battling for higher-level courses for my children while wanting them just to go to school like peers of other racial and ethnic groups. The middle ground is the interim space of pushing my children academically and still honoring their sports giftedness. The interim space is exchanging resources with other mothers while realizing that sometimes I am the Other. These Revelation readings aid womanist maternal middle dwellers.

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Roberto Mata

In Rev 17–18, John offers a vision of imperial Rome as a woman who will be judged on account of her idolatry, economic corruption, and persecution of God’s people. In anticipation of her judgment, an angel declares her fall while denouncing the complicity of the kings of the earth and the collusion of the merchants of the earth who “have grown rich from the power of her luxury” (Rev 18:3). Given her impending demise, a voice from heaven calls the people of God to exit the city to avoid experiencing its plagues (Rev 18:4). In our respective readings of Rev 18, my colleagues and I approach Rev 18 through various contextual lenses and use multiple approaches, including gender analysis, womanist-maternal thought, and borderlands theory. This reflection briefly maps the intersections with my borderlands reading as well as the overall contributions to our interpretation of Rev 18.

In her reading of Rev 17–18, Stephanie Buckhannon Crowder explores the mother-whore figure as “a mother living in a Roman imperialistic, patriarchal system designed to limit her economic access and mobility.” Drawing from womanist maternal experiences, Crowder deploys an intersectional analysis that enables her to maintain the gender critique without exculpating the mother-whore for the power she holds at the expense of marginalized communities. Although “a mother does what a mother does for her children,” these imperial children have lots of power, which

emanates from Babylon's political, economic, social, cultural, and religious loins. In Crowder's view, they all partake in the material gain from Mom's sexual escapades with the merchants and the kings of the earth. Thus, "Babylon may not be a gold digger, 'but she ain't messing with no broke.'" As a highly agentic woman in Revelation, the mother-whore emerges as a "savvy" CEO (18:3) or corporate mogul, who aligns with what Crowder describes as a paternalistic, patriarchal, marginalizing political and economic system for a certain quality of life. However, she eventually becomes a victim as the system that commits matricide by killing the mother-whore. Crowder's womanist-maternal analysis of the mother-whore Babylon succeeds in bringing to the forefront the otherwise-ignored aspect of motherhood in the study of Revelation. Nonetheless, the identification with an imperial mother-whore calls for further mapping of the implications for real readers who, while identifying with the mother-whore, might denounce its delinquent practices, for she becomes rich at the expense of oppressed men and women throughout the Roman Empire. The identification of Babylon with an actual woman remains a point of contention, but Crowder succeeds in mapping the power relationships embedded in the analysis of the mother-whore motif.

Pillay reads against the grain to interrogate how Revelation serves to sanctify many hierarchies of power. In a postapartheid setting in South Africa, she argues that gender hierarchies are cast as a "God-ordained" necessity "for order, favor, and benevolence in a time of chaos, crisis, and despair." Thus, she is critical of the holy halos accorded to patriarchy in times of crisis. Although apartheid is long gone and women seem to have access to various leadership positions in secular as well as religious institutions, Pillay laments that these women ultimately remain trapped within existing patriarchal structures. Indeed, she decries the "triumph of patriarchy" and calls to account for any complicity and guilt in it. This reading from the margins not only reads against the grain but reflects on how peoples and groups turn to Revelation to legitimate their hold and claims to power. Her reading resonates with my borderlands reading in that it presents a flesh-and-blood reader who maps interpretations of Revelation in the creation of the holy halos of patriarchal structures and utopian visions that reinforce oppressive power structures. While at times it was difficult to follow, Pillay's reading of the intersection between gender hierarchies and power is a prophetic call of sorts to make gender a crucial category of analysis.

Raj Nadella's contribution reads Rev 18 through the contemporary situation of Asian Americans, mainly South Asians, who seem to readily buy



into American notions of progress and upward socioeconomic mobility. He holds that South Asians, for access of power, often participate in and perpetuate the empire's agenda against other marginalized communities. Thus, Nadella argues that Rev 18 reveals oppressive economic structures and sanctions its demise while laying bare the imperialist's centripetal economic forces. In his view, the call to "my people" to exit Babylon is a call to believers who were lured by Rome in their pursuit of power. I agree with Nadella that John's critique of merchants is aimed at believers who remain ambivalent about their relationship with Rome, but I also add that the same dynamics apply to the new Jerusalem. In desiring to enter the new Jerusalem, they could be said to inhabit a political and economic borderland that ultimately leads them to pursue their self-preservation. In my view, these believers are akin to Gloria Anzaldúa's reference to those who occupy a third space between two geopolitical forces.

As beneficiaries of imperial economic structures, even their coming out of Babylon constitutes an act of self-preservation rather than repentance in the exploitations of marginalized peoples. While I concur with Nadella that John addresses this critique to believers benefiting from their socioeconomic and political relations with an empire, I think that reading along John's line of argumentation merits further reflection on a few fronts. First, Nadella's reading reinforces John's vilification of those in the inscribed assemblies who do not agree with him. Second, Nadella's reading is not sufficiently critical of the new Jerusalem as an alternative to Rome's imperial apparatus. Third, what John casts as cooperation could be seen instead as a way for these savvy believers to negotiate their socioeconomic and political status. In such case, then their coming out is not merely an act of self-preservation but about preparing to deal with the emerging power looming in the background, namely, the new Jerusalem.

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Raj Nadella

The three essays by Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, Roberto Mata, and Miranda N. Pillay, written from disparate contexts yet in many ways similarly marginalized social locations, do an excellent job of highlighting the profound ways in which the book of Revelation, chapters 17–18 in particular, continues to address sociopolitical issues in the twenty-first century.

Crowder's insightful and engaging essay offers a subversively positive reading of the whore, who has been demonized by many Christian interpreters. In Crowder's reading, the mother-whore becomes the symbol of

many marginalized women, especially black women, who are forced to work in oppressive systems but manage to survive and thrive by exercising their agency tactfully. Crowder makes a helpful distinction between oppressive systems that employ the marginalized in exploitative ways and the marginalized themselves who unwillingly find themselves in service of such systems, and cautions readers not to equate the latter with the former. This is especially true of African American women, historically and in the present, who have been placed in impossible situations but, against all expectations, manage to pursue their own interests.

I find intriguing and liberative Crowder's suggestion that the whore figure is a mother living in the Roman imperial system that was carefully designed to dehumanize and deprive her of access to basic human dignity, but I wonder whether we know of similar first-century figures from the margins that were placed in such situations but managed to thrive. Might it not make more sense to suggest that the woman figure in Rev 17–18 was one who was associated with the empire and was turned into embodiment of all evils of the empire, due to the seer's own misogyny? I am reminded of colonial contexts in India when British women associated with the empire were invariably blamed for any evil perpetuated by their male counterparts. Crowder needs to clarify further how she might address the issue that, while the mother-whore might actually be a survivor in an oppressive system, she herself becomes the source of unimaginable violence against those in similarly and perhaps significantly more marginalized situations. In the end, she dies not solely at the hands of the system but also at the hands of those at the margins who see themselves as her victims. It appears that the empire has successfully managed to pit one marginalized group (the Lamb) against another (the mother-whore).

Pillay's essay deftly explores how the book of Revelation, which served as a catalyst for liberation during apartheid, continues to shape, albeit in unfortunate ways, the current South African society. Similar to Crowder, Pillay raises issues pertaining to gender and foregrounds the violence of patriarchy in current contexts as well as in biblical texts. Especially helpful are the parallels she draws between patriarchal proclivities in Rev 17–18 that demonize women who seek autonomy and the political climate in South Africa, where powerful women are consistently equated with evil, and opposition to gender equality initiatives is based on biblical values that supposedly cohere with traditional Afrikaner and African values. Pillay helpfully calls attention to the ways in which the freedom that is offered to some by Rev 18 can also turn into oppression, or continued

oppression, for many. In this case, many of the people who have benefited from freedom quickly turned it into oppression of women who needed it more than them in the first place. Her essay is a powerful reminder that we cannot turn a blind eye to the oppressive nature of biblical texts, but it fails to address a key aspect of biblical interpretation. Biblical texts are often interpreted prescriptively as speaking to current contexts, but they are also descriptive of the contexts in which they were written. Much of the oppressive power of biblical texts arises out of interpreters' proclivity to privilege the prescriptive aspect at the expense of the descriptive.

Mata's provocative piece reads Rev 18:4 as a call for the self-deportation of the "my people" from the socioeconomic and political structures of the Roman Empire. Any who refuse to leave will be subjected to poverty, disease, and perhaps death itself, and will be denied benefits of the eschatological empire. In Mata's reading, akin to the strategies of Trump's Republican administration (2017–2021), John employs any means at his disposable to force his intended audience to self-deport from Babylon.

While Mata does an excellent job of bringing the text alive in light of current political contexts, he does not seem to fully consider the possibility that "my people" in 18:4 who are exhorted to come out might belong to the upper echelons of the society, and that John's call to "my people" seems to arise out of a commitment to their welfare rather than a desire to punish them. John does warn "my people" of suffering, poverty, and death if they fail to leave Babylon, but his warnings are more about avoiding the plagues of the present rather than about denying them the benefits of the future empire. Speaking from outside the borders of Babylon, the seer seems to peer from the vantage point as someone on the margins with little power rather than as one who wields power and threatens punishment for those who defy his orders. Furthermore, Mata could have explored further the possibility that the self-deportation was metaphorical—that is, it was as much a moral exit from the imperial culture, values, and ideology of Babylon as it was a spatial exit. What might such a metaphorical reading mean in our current contexts to faith communities that are seeking to live faithfully in challenging times?

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Miranda N. Pillay

The book of Revelation continues to influence and shape Christian responses to different contemporary societal issues in a variety of contexts. This section of the volume on Rev 18 points to the possible liberative potential of

what may also be considered a text of terror. In reflecting on these four contributions I turn my focus to this particular aspect of the writings: namely, the oppressive/repressive and liberative/life-giving potential of Rev 18 in different social contexts. Because “real readers engage real texts at real times through the lens of their ontological reality” (Crowder), the same text could mean different things to different people in different contexts.

While the possible liberative interpretations of this first-century text are explored by the four authors writing from their particular twenty-first-century contexts, they are not oblivious to certain inherent oppressive features of the ancient text or the repressive interpretations that serve to keep dominant groups in power and oppressed groups in their subordinate places. For example, Roberto Mata and I explicitly point out that the uncritical embrace of texts may reinforce systemic forms of oppression that marginalized groups seek to overcome. Mata argues that John’s drawcard (the new Jerusalem) is an exclusive (illusive?) green card with a promise of well-being and security; that the misery that will befall those who refuse to come out of Babylon is so severe that they have no other choice but to self-deport. I also draw attention to the rhetoric of fear employed by the author of Revelation. I argue that by labeling Babylon the “great whore” who deserves to be deserted, punished, and killed and by naming the new Jerusalem the bride, wife of the lamb who deserves to be entered, justifies and upholds patriarchal control over women and their sexuality, and that the illusion that women can choose being bad-woman or good-woman may make women complicit in upholding patriarchal hierarchy. Both Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder and I identify the agency of the woman depicted as “Babylon the great, mother of whores” in the Revelation of John, and so challenge the demonization of the woman’s independence. In this way Mata and Crowder challenge the normative gendering of power. Crowder points to the covert power that may be held by mothers who are economically disempowered on the basis of systemic racism, classism, and sexism.

Mata and I see the call to come out of Babylon as a rhetoric of fear in order to persuade a move that might not necessarily be to the well-being of marginalized groups, as the alternative call—to come into the new Jerusalem—could result in setting up new hierarchies or in perpetuating existing hierarchies of power. Raj Nadella, on the other hand, sees the call to come out of Babylon as an interpretive framework to highlight the complicity of “my people,” whom he suggests are likely to be members of John’s community “who may have maintained close political

and economic proximity to corridors of power.” He then uses the motif of “my people” within the context the South Asian experiences in the United States to argue that their hybrid identity results in an ambivalence on how best to relate to power structures at the center. By mimicking the dominant cultural group, subgroups (or marginalized groups) serve the agenda of the dominant group, which is to maintain power and control. All four contributions uncover the systemic nature of unjust use of positional power in particular societal contexts, and use the book of Revelation in general and Rev 17–18 in particular to explore possible Christian responses to these societal challenges. Implicit in each contribution is the intersectionality of text (Scripture), history of interpretation (tradition), recognition of ideology of text and interpreter (reason), and the lived reality of real people in real time (experience).



## Conclusion





## Minority Critics Reading Texts Together: Reflections from and for the Margins

Fernando F. Segovia

A characteristic of ethnic-racial minority criticism is the lack of value attached and the lack of attention paid to it in academic-intellectual circles—fields of studies, institutions of learning, learned societies. Ethnic-racial biblical criticism proves no exception in this regard. Indeed, such a fate is inevitable in light of the differential access to and wielding of power that grounds and governs relations between the dominant formation as self and the minority formation as other. Such relations, therefore, are neither neutral nor insignificant; to the contrary, they are distinctly political and consequential. They are dictated and enforced by the self, yielding a dialectics of inclusion and exclusion, an oppositional divide that can be characterized in various other ways: center and margins, core and periphery, privilege and discrimination. They work, consequently, to the benefit of the self and the detriment of the other: sustained possession of power and control alongside continued absence of access and freedom.

The other is by definition, socially as well as culturally, inferior—materially and discursively inferior. From the point of view of knowledge, the other is epistemically deprived. This status can be regarded as either invincible or as surpassable. If the latter position holds, then the other must appropriate and reproduce the theoretical and methodological apparatus, the critical angle of vision, of the self. Should the other opt to do otherwise, to chart and pursue its own path of inquiry, the response can only be along the lines of devalorization and cornering. Here charges of provincialism or emotionalism or experientialism are the norm. Such is the case whether this alternative path of inquiry has been formulated on the basis of principles elaborated by the self itself or on the basis of principles drawn from

the world of the other. Otherwise, the dialectical system would collapse—and, with it, the possession of power and control.

In such circumstances, the other hardly ever retreats into the imitation expected, unless forced to do so for the sake of survival, but presses on instead in ever more determined and ever more sophisticated fashion. The other also does so in ever more collaborative fashion. A collective project of minority critics such as the present one is testimony to such resolve and such creativity. A distinct way of pressing the cause, I have found, is to let a different gaze shine on such work—a minority gaze that lingers on such work, bringing out its diversity and inventiveness and power, not a dominant gaze that downplays, stereotypes, and relegates. What follows, therefore, is a critical exposition of the dynamics and mechanics of interpretation throughout, leading to a final recapitulation of sundry visions and strategies opened for minority criticism in the future.

I begin with an overview of the critical filters at work in the interpretation of the four texts covered in this volume. This analysis is two-fold. First, I provide a comparative summary of the various readings. Such comparison involves identifying the center of interest and setting forth the range of positions advanced regarding focus of attention and mode of evaluation. Second, I offer a detailed exposition of each reading, revolving around a number of key components. Such analysis includes the representation of the critic's own social-cultural context, the relation between such a context and the critical approach adopted, the set of elements underlying such a critical approach, the theoretical apparatus invoked for the critical approach, and ideological critique of the text in question. Following this overview, I identify the contributions offered by such minoritized readings of the texts for the pursuit of ethnic-racial minority criticism. In so doing, I gather the wisdom offered by these engagements from the margins for the benefit of future reflections from the margins.

In proceeding as I do, therefore, I turn these readings, with all the wealth of information and resources they provide, into an exercise in, a corpus of, critical theory. Such an exercise adds to the models advanced by Maria Lauret and Tat-siong Benny Liew, as set forth in the introduction. Lauret has done so by way of reflection on the critical study of ethnic-racial literatures in the United States, while Liew does so by way of reflection on the problematic identified at the heart of ethnic-racial biblical criticism. This exercise in critical theory is undoubtedly, overflowing, multipolar and multidimensional—in contexts, in models, and in results.

It thus opens up endless horizons for the pursuit and development of ethnic-racial biblical criticism.

### Genesis 21: Ishmael the Son of Hagar and Isaac the Son of Sarah

Genesis 21:1–21 is the story regarding the different fates of the children of Abraham in the light of the covenant of God and its line of inheritance. These minority readings center on the narrative feature of characterization, with special attention to the divide between insiders and outsiders. In pursuing this angle of inquiry, these readings move in different directions with regard to focus of attention and mode of representation.

In terms of focalization, the spectrum bestows much attention on the outsider characters, with some variation in this regard. Thus, Ahida Calderón Pilarski and Lynne St. Clair Darden concentrate on the figure of Hagar. Henry W. Morisada Reitz and Linzie M. Treadway pursue the mother-child pair of Hagar and Ishmael. Jione Havea stands out by turning to King Abimelech, whom he takes as a signifier for the people of the land. In terms of portrayal, the spectrum shows sustained concern with the mode of outsidership, with a variety of emphases in this regard as well. In the case of Hagar, Calderón Pilarski highlights her status as a single mother, while St. Clair Darden emphasizes the quandary of her hybrid position as she takes up her fate in the wilderness. Regarding Hagar and Ishmael, both Morisada Reitz and Treadway foreground their status as aliens in the land of Israel, while Treadway points to a change of status with their lives in the wilderness. Last, Havea foregrounds the status of Abimelech and the people of the land as aliens in their own land.

From the perspective of ideological critique, the spectrum reveals considerable disagreement regarding critical assessment: from altogether positive, through mixed, to decidedly negative. At the positive end, there stands Calderón Pilarski, who regards the figure of Hagar as an exemplar in her determined search for survival within a highly precarious situation. In the middle of the spectrum, I would situate Darden and Treadway. For Darden, Hagar stands at a crossroads of hybridity in Paran: imitation of the dominant framework left behind in Israel or espousal of a different framework through critical remembrance and analysis. For Treadway, Hagar and Ishmael undergo decidedly deplorable as well as unquestionably promising treatment at the hands of God. At the negative pole of the spectrum, Havea and Morisada Reitz stand. Havea dismisses outright the way in which Abraham deceives and displaces the people of the land in

their own land. Morisada Reitz, although holding in principle to a diversity of interpretation, deplores the treatment accorded by both Abraham and God.

#### Ahida Calderón Pilarski: Hagar as Single Mother

In approaching Gen 21:1–21, Calderón Pilarski embraces both the ethnic-racial context of the Latinx community, with special attention to single mothers within the group, and the tradition of minority criticism, with special emphasis on Latinx American critics. In so doing, she establishes a twofold relation between the world of antiquity, as represented in the text of Genesis, and the world of today, as embodied in the fabric of the United States. This relation is grounded on the identification of Hagar as a member of an ethnic-racial minority group, which thus opens the way for a structural connection with members of ethnic-racial minority groups today, both materially and metaphorically. The approach also bears a strong religious-theological imprint: a quest for orientation, on moving from wilderness into life, from the Bible.

The material dimension of the relation is set as follows: the narrative life of the Egyptian Hagar as a single mother alongside the actual lives of Latinas who are single mothers. The metaphorical dimension proceeds as follows: the fragile situation of the Egyptian Hagar in the wilderness of Beersheba, as she looks for a well, actual water, with survival in mind, alongside the precarious situation of Latinx and minority critics in the wilderness of the field of studies, as they search for wells, spaces for reflection, with support in mind. In unfolding this relation, Calderón Pilarski draws on theoretical frameworks and critical approaches from the repertoire of Latin and Latinx American scholarship.

The approach itself is given a universal foundation. It is incumbent, she argues, on all critics, dominant and minority alike, to reflect on the layout of the field as a whole as well as on their own place within it. Only then will diversity emerge as incontrovertible and indispensable, militating against the privileging of any one approach and enabling encounters with cultural others. Only then, therefore, will the wilderness experience of minoritized critics come to an end. What she does through her own critical lens as a Latina critic is, in effect, advanced as what all critics should do with respect to their corresponding angles of vision.

The wells of support behind her lens are clearly identified: for theory, the work of Walter Mignolo, a Latin American cultural critic; for method,

the project of liberation theology and hermeneutics. From Mignolo, she adopts a vision of epistemic decolonization: a view of peripheral discourses as polycentric (colonial semiosis) and of dominant discourses as riddled with omissions (border thinking). From liberation theology, she takes its process of threefold mediation: analysis of the text, preceded by analysis of location (social conditions of people) and followed by analysis of praxis (liberation from such conditions). Minority criticism thus functions for Calderón Pilarski as an exercise in border thinking, forged in the polycentric periphery, intent on liberation for faces and voices in the periphery. With regard to Gen 21:1–21, there are two sets of faces and voices in mind.

The first set concerns the material level: single mothers in the Latinx community. These are brought to the text as the result of a discussion on the patriarchal narratives involving a group of Latina pastors. Amid a sense of despair, the figure of Hagar emerges as a source, a well, of hope—especially so for Latina working mothers in the churches, in light of God's solidarity in the midst of her oppressive situation as a minority single mother. With this in mind, the threefold process of interpretation in liberation theology is put into action. With eyes set on the future, on a vision and strategies for transformation, she delves into the present of the context and the past of the text.

First, with regard to context, the social conditions experienced by Latina working mothers are analyzed with the help of government census data and a social research project. What these reveal is a highly precarious state of affairs affecting millions of women and their children, due to a lethal combination of economic, gender, and ethnic factors. Attention then shifts to the text. The figure of Hagar as a working mother is analyzed in dialogue with a spectrum of interpretations. What these show is a no less precarious state of affairs as well, the result of a similar mix of economic, gender, and ethnic factors. What remains pending is the third step, the analysis of praxis with transformation in mind, which must be conducted by the same collective that gave birth to the inquiry. This would outline the wells for the empowerment of Latina working mothers, in the light of the biblical text, toward liberation from oppression.

The second set refers to the metaphorical level: minority critics in general and Latinx critics in particular, whose labor in the field of studies proves precarious in its own right. Here, however, more direction is provided in terms of praxis. Two wells of support are identified: recourse to the work of other minority critics, in all of their diversity, and attention to the variety of recent projects in empirical hermeneutics, with

their collection of readings on the part of real communities of ordinary readers. Such a critical move will serve to put into effect not only the envisioned diversity of critics but also the desired intercultural dialogue with others in the field. Such a move will activate, in no uncertain terms, border thinking across the polycentric world.

### Jione Havea: Abimelech and the People as Aliens

Havea's reading is steeped in a twofold context of the geographic region of Oceania: his origins as a native of the kingdom of Tonga, a Polynesian state and archipelago, and his residence as an alien in the Commonwealth of Australia. He characterizes the reading as islandish—a political turn to and option for native or indigenous peoples. Such a reading is grounded on two fundamental historical-political features of Oceania: first, as a world of colonization, which brought the Bible along as part of its repertoire; second, as a world of discrimination, which deployed the Bible toward such ends by way of race and color. An islandish reading is thus one that foregrounds minoritized subjects in texts, human (characters) and nonhuman (issues, themes, settings) alike, in order to signify what has been bypassed and relegated to the underside by dominant readings. An islandish reading is also one that appeals to the experience and wisdom of the minoritized today in shedding light on the minoritized in antiquity.

In approaching Gen 21, Havea acknowledges but goes beyond Hagar and Ishmael in the exercise of signifying. This is because they have already been foregrounded by minoritized critics—rescued from the ideological oblivion to which they had been consigned by the dominant Judeo-Christian focus on the lineage of Isaac. Other subjects, however, remain to be signified, and for this attention to the whole of Gen 21 is in order. Thus, Havea brings together verses 1–21, the story about Isaac and Ishmael, and verses 22–34, a story about Abraham and Abimelech. The subjects in question include the people of the land, as embodied by Abimelech, and the wells of water, central to both stories. In such foregrounding, moreover, new links emerge in the narrative, and these in turn lead to a fundamental revision of the figure of Abraham.

What the narration seeks to accomplish is evident. Following the portrayal of Abraham as prototypical alien, Gen 21 presents him as an alien in this land as well, seemingly the land of King Abimelech. In the second episode of verses 22–34, the narrator affirms Abraham's character by way of two pacts with the king, who acts on behalf of his people and his land:

trustworthy, given the first oath of doing rightly; and invested, given the second oath to rightful possession. At the end, the narrator further affirms Abraham's character with strong religious-theological overtones, as he invokes the name of God. What Havea finds, at the underside of this narration, is altogether different, an alternative reading.

To begin with, the narrator moves swiftly to bring the focus back to Abraham, moving away from the first well of water to the second, abandoning Hagar and Ishmael thereby in the wilderness. Further, as an alien, Abraham comes across as one who is rootless, not mindful of his own home, and who acts as if he were indeed a local, minoritizing the people of the land. He seeks the exclusive run of the land and expects others to follow suit. Rather than trustworthy and invested, he emerges as a deceitful and cunning character, as suspected by Abimelech himself. Last, the narrator uses the invocation of God as cover for the dispossession of the land, conveyed by the renaming of the second well as Beersheba. In sum, from an islandish perspective, what Gen 21 does is what the Bible—alongside other scriptures and cultures as well as many readings of Gen 21 itself—does: the exclusion of certain subjects.

#### Henry W. Morisada Rietz: Hagar and Ishmael as Hybrid

As point of entry, Morisada Rietz unfolds a critical mapping of his ethnic-racial context as a child of mixed parentage in Hawai'i. His father was Japanese American, born in Hawai'i of Japanese migrant laborers who had come to the United States to work in the sugar plantations—thus, a second-generation American. His mother was European American, born in East Germany, who escaped to West Germany just before the Berlin Wall, migrated to the United States, and settled in Hawai'i—hence, a first-generation American. This background he analyzes from both a social-cultural and a personal-psychological perspective—filtered through a Hawai'ian and Japanese angle of vision. What emerges is a construction as a bastard, which in turn engenders a major critical stance and undertaking.

Such a classification is imposed on him by society and culture. In the eyes of the dominant circles of Hawai'i, he is a bastard, neither white (or *hapa*) nor Japanese: a *hapa-haole* or "half-white." In the eyes of traditional Japanese circles in Hawai'i, he is a bastard as well, falling outside family expectations: he was born of a woman from outside the group, a child of parents who never married, and a son whose existence remained concealed from the paternal side for decades. This classification he assumes fully in

his own life and mind. Indeed, he does so in visionary and strategic fashion, turning bastardization into a tool for critical exposé and ideological resistance. This project of hybridization receives expansive deployment.

Hybridization is applied, first, and extensively so, to the social-cultural framework, with a focus on claims to ethnic-racial purity in descent and culture on the part of population groups. Thus, Morisada Rietz has recourse to a variety of scholarly voices and studies on both the dominant culture and the Japanese tradition in Hawai'i to show that such claims, such inclusions and exclusions, represent social-cultural constructions in their own right, forged in particular circumstances and with particular aims in mind. What emerges instead is hybridity throughout. Second, the project is also applied, though briefly so, to the craft and guild of biblical criticism. Here he appeals directly to the tradition of minority criticism, as formulated in the foundational volume on minority criticism, *They Were All Together in One Place?*, and its foregrounding of variety in method and theory as imperative for the field of studies. This he does in reaction to the inclusions and exclusions generated by the majority academy, with its insistence on singularity of meaning, its system of professional regulation and advancement, and its marginalization of dissenting movements, such as minority criticism. What is espoused thereby is a hybridity of approaches. Third, it is further deployed, and pointedly so, with regard to biblical texts in general and Gen 21:1–21 in particular.

Texts emerge as hybrid both materially and semantically, and this unit is no exception. It is a hybrid, first of all, insofar as various levels of editing are discernible in it, each responding to its own contextual setting and displaying its own ideological slant. It is also a hybrid, moreover, insofar as different interpreters foreground different textual elements and produce different readings, all similarly responding to their own settings and slants as well. While some have seen this unit as a text of terror, given the treatment accorded to Hagar by God, others have viewed it as a text of survival, given the assistance extended to Hagar throughout by God. Morisada Reitz himself foregrounds the plight of Hagar and Ishmael, the horrible treatment accorded to them by Abraham, and their exclusion from the covenant by God. What is endorsed as a result is a hybridity of interpretations.

In the end, therefore, bastardizing or hybridizing serves to destabilize any and all claims to purity—whether in the social-cultural, the academic-scholarly, or the critical-interpretive realm. What Morisada Reitz proposes instead is to foreground agency and responsibility in any task of constructions, above all in the relations of inclusion and exclusion that



such construction can and does generate. This is what he refers to as the project of dis/inheriting traditions, so that the dialectic of self and other may yield to a relation of empathy and collaboration instead.

Lynne St. Clair Darden: Hagar as Warning

Darden deals with Gen 21:1–20 in indirect fashion. Her focus is not on analysis of the text as such, yielding a particular reading of the unit, but on analysis of its reception in the African American community, involving assessment of a variety of readings advanced over time. At the center of this focus, there lies the figure of Hagar and the significance attached to this character with respect to the lives of African American women—and African Americans in general—over the history of the community. Such emphasis on relevance is what Darden understands by scripturalization: the interpretation of biblical texts not in terms of construction and representation but rather in terms of activation with the community in mind, in the light of particular concerns or dimensions. The interest is thus not on what the text means, with a view of the critic as interpreter, but on what it means for communities, with a view of the critic as scribe. What the study proposes is a new scripturalization of Hagar, given a major shift in the situation of African American women and African Americans as a whole.

For this exercise in scripturalization, Darden calls on various theoretical frameworks. One of these is African American theology, especially womanist theology, and its tradition of biblical interpretation in light of community exigencies. From this field she draws on the work of Delores Williams and the close analogy posited between Hagar and African American women. Another is postcolonial studies and its ideological analysis of colonial discourse. Here she appeals to the work of Homi Bhabha, with its emphasis on a third cultural space. The last framework involves cultural studies and its critical analysis of textual representation in society and culture in general. From this field she has recourse to the film *Daughters of the Dust*, released in 1991, written and directed by Julie Dash, and its representation of the character Haagar. These frameworks are brought together as follows: the traditional reading of Hagar, as conveyed by Williams, needs updating for today; this can be achieved through the lens of postcolonial hybridity, as formulated by Bhabha; the portrayal of Haagar in *Daughters of the Dust*, as conceived by Dash, can serve as a model for such updating. What makes updating indispensable is a key socioeconomic development among African American women, and the community as a whole.

The traditional reading of Hagar has been along the lines of oppression and exploitation—identification with Hagar. This reading follows a hermeneutical model of liberation in the face of national inequality and marginalization. It is a reading that goes against the grain of the dominant reading. If the latter identifies with Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac as a chosen people in a promised land, the former does so with Hagar and Ishmael as having a claim, through Abraham, to the promise as well. Williams appropriates, expands on, and elaborates this reading in her own way along a path of survival, rather than liberation. This reading responds to a general experience of poverty and hostility among African American women, and African Americans in general. For Darden, this reading demands revision, given economic advancement on the part of many African American women, and men alike, which in turn has resulted in a complex and diversified community at present.

Toward this end, a number of interdisciplinary conversations can be of assistance, including postcolonial studies, and especially so the theoretical tools provided by Bhabha (hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence), which prove quite sharp in analyzing such diversity. Thus, while the traditional reading does go against the grain, it also adheres to the framework behind the dominant reading, insofar as it seeks a share in the system. A hybrid reading, therefore, that mimics the dominant reading—in resisting, it reinscribes. The result has been the ambivalence that lies at the heart of African American identity. For Darden, here is the rub, for such cultural ambivalence poses considerable dangers, in light of the socioeconomic shift and the strong attraction of the status quo. Two such temptations are named: one from within the community itself and the other toward those outside.

With regard to the community, the new social distinctions may well yield to the lure of classism and result in a state of alienation from the community. With respect to those outside, such distinctions may well bow to the lure of racism and engender a stance of discrimination against other ethnic-racial minority formations. Given the powerful beckoning of the dominant ethos, a change in the scripturalization of Hagar is in order for African American life in the twenty-first century. A new reading is needed that can serve as both a call for reflection on the diversity of the community and a warning regarding the system behind such stratification. The character of Haagar can readily supply such a reading. As she seeks to leave behind, in a quest for opportunity and thriving, the traditional African Gullah culture of a Sea Island and embrace the dominant Euro-American

culture of the mainland, this representation of Hagar in the wilderness can be taken as conveying a twofold alert: the peril of forgetting and imitation as well as the need for critical self-reflection.

Linzie M. Treadway: Hagar as Free

Treadway undertakes a close reading of Gen 21:1–21, paying detailed attention to the literary construction and ideological perspective of the narrative. This is, however, an exercise in close reading with a bent, set as it is within a theoretical framework of reading with Native American eyes. This framework does make a distinction between the minoritized and the indigenous, insofar as Native Americans deal with the question of political sovereignty, in addition to those of civil rights and social equality. At the same time, the framework ranks the indigenous alongside the minoritized, given the similar social and cultural conditions of marginalization and exclusion that afflict both populations. Consequently, argues Treadway, the voices of Native Americans belong at the forefront of minority criticism.

The reading envisioned is further set against an early and classic example of biblical interpretation from a Native American perspective, the critical take of liberation theology on the part of Robert Allen Warrior, dating back to 1989. Warrior challenges the central appeal to the exodus in liberation by exposing its aftermath for those already on the land, the Canaanites—not at all liberation, but dispossession and displacement. What emerges from the text is a God who is deliverer and conqueror at once—a most troubling religious-theological position. For Treadway, what Warrior has done must continue to be done with regard to the entire Bible, especially in light of the way in which Scripture has been used in the dispossession and displacement of Native Americans throughout. Attention to narrative authorizing dispossession serves as the driving force behind this reading of Gen 21:1–21.

The reading approaches Hagar and Ishmael as metaphorical natives. They are not indigenous characters as such, for Hagar is Egyptian, but their representation bears much in common with that of Native Americans: both are victims of multidimensional oppression and both are voiceless under their masters. The reading finds two sides to the text: one, decidedly objectionable; the other, undeniably generous. The former, problematic dimension reveals a God complicit in sexual exploitation, abusive slavery, improper disinheritance, and outright banishment of the other. The latter,

redeeming dimension shows a God engaged in blessing, rescuing, liberating, and accompanying the other.

For Treadway, therefore, the dialectic of God posited by Warrior regarding the exodus is continued in this story on a different key: a God of disinheritance and a God of promise at once. Whereas for Warrior, the dialectic applied to different ethnic-racial groups, Israelites and Canaanites, for Treadway, it applies to the alien as other. From the former perspective, what matters is the preservation of Abraham's lineage and Israel's identity as the chosen people. Hagar and Ishmael represent unacceptable mixture as aliens. From the latter perspective, what matters is the liberation wrought in the wilderness of Paran, away from the land of Israel as well as from the land of Egypt. Hagar and Ishmael embody thriving by themselves, in harmony with others and the land and under the care of God. For Native Americans, Treadway concludes, this story of thriving in separation, away from the dominant ethos, can serve as a source of hope, if only to a degree.

### 1 Kings 21: Naboth of Jezreel and Ahab of Samaria

First Kings 21 is the episode relating a conflict over land involving Naboth, the local proprietor of an ancestral vineyard in Jezreel, and Ahab, the king of Samaria, whose palace borders on the vineyard and who is bent on acquiring the land for use as a garden. These minority approaches revolve largely around the nature of the dispute as involving insiders and outsiders. In so doing, these critics pursue different points of attention and underline different aspects of the dispute.

In terms of focus, varying features of the story are highlighted. Steed Vernyl Davidson attends to a series of unevennesses and ambiguities in narration that are taken to convey the actual thrust of the story. The rest focus on either the land or characterization, or both. Timothy J. Sandoval stresses the element of characterization, especially with regard to Naboth and God. Angeline M. G. Song centers on the land itself, bringing out the conflicting attitudes at play in the story. Nasili Vaka'uta also opts for characterization, with a primary interest in the figure of Jezebel; yet, he too emphasizes the motif of the land, from the point of view of its designation as ancestral. Gale A. Yee attends equally to both elements: the land, from the point of view of appropriation, and characterization, with a focus on Jezebel and Ahab.

In terms of hue, different takes on the narrative come to the fore. For Davidson, the story aims to sanction land grabs by the monarchy, though

by way of a different strategy of dispossession. Sandoval views Naboth as a moral exemplar and God as just in judgment. Song posits a clash between a proper view of land as anchor of identity and an improper view of land as a commodity for exchange. Vaka'uta sees Jezebel, as foreign woman, as the main target of the unit. Yee highlights the abuse of power on the part of Jezebel and Ahab, while also pointing out how they are cast into stereotypical constructs of rejection.

In terms of ideological critique, there is wide agreement, though a range of opinion does exist. Toward one end of the spectrum, one finds approval of the story, as seen in Sandoval and Song. While the former sympathizes with the divine condemnation of Ahab and Jezebel by God, the latter praises the conception of the land reflected by Naboth. I place Vaka'uta in the middle. While Naboth's view of the land as identity is similarly praised, I detect a critique of the way in which foreign women, such as Jezebel, are treated in the larger ideological program behind the unit. At the minority end of the spectrum, dissatisfaction rules. Davidson argues that the story not only expresses approval of land confiscation but also supplies a better warrant toward this end. Yee frowns on the abuse of royal authority by Ahab and Jezebel as well as the negative stereotypical roles assigned to them as outsiders.

### Steed Vernyl Davidson: Disguised Warrant for Land Appropriation

Davidson's take on 1 Kgs 21 as a minority critic is indirect rather than direct. It is not direct on two counts: one finds no reference to or identification with his ethnic-racial provenance and no critical lens grounded in or shaped by such origins. It is indirect because he does pursue a line of inquiry associated with a particular ethnic-racial designation. Such analysis focuses on the question of land in the context of imperial-colonial frameworks, more specifically the dispute between long-held possession by indigenous inhabitants and sought-after appropriation by external agents. The line of inquiry thus centers on the process of dispossession and acquisition in imperial-colonial confrontations. Such interest applies to both antiquity and modernity: the literary accounts of the biblical texts and the historical trajectories of colonizing projects. As such, the approach reflects profound sympathy with the claims, travails, and demands of native populations.

Toward this end, Davidson adopts what I describe as a comparative postcolonial approach. It is postcolonial insofar as it focuses on the complex

dynamics and mechanics at work in the land dispute of 1 Kgs 21, with special attention to the rhetorical device of mimicry. In so doing, the approach opts against any flat reading of the episode by bringing out points of uncertainty and tension. It is comparative insofar as it situates 1 Kgs 21 within a trajectory of land appropriation in Western imperial-colonial undertakings for the sake of mutual enlightenment, with a focus on land struggles in sixteenth-century Virginia between the British settlers and the indigenous peoples. In so doing, the approach adopts a transhistorical and transcivilizational model of critical comparison.

From the postcolonial perspective, Davidson finds in 1 Kgs 21 an episode that may be and has been seen as a straightforward anticolonial text: a condemnation of the injustice perpetrated on Naboth, involving both theft of land and taking of life, by Ahab and Jezebel, as ordained by God and conveyed by the prophet Elijah. From a liberationist perspective, such vindication proves most welcome at this point in the Deuteronomistic historical narrative, after so much conquest and so much abuse. This reading, however, Davidson finds untenable in the face of inconsistencies and deviations in the plot. What emerges instead is a colonializing text that disguises itself as anticolonial (mimicry) but that conveys a more appropriate strategy for land seizures on the part of the monarchy—in keeping with the ideological program of Deuteronomistic history.

In effect, as the plot develops, the issue of land recedes, the fault is shifted to the character of Jezebel, and the accusation against Naboth turns toward the charge of idolatry. By the end, the dispossession and appropriation of native land stands untouched and undisputed. At the same time, a proper procedure for such actions is advanced through Jezebel: the need for a legal framework that would provide adequate grounding for such seizures—in other words, a discursive mask for a brute exercise in material power. Such a mask would foreground indigenous social-cultural inferiority in general and the failure to develop the land properly in particular. Such a process of ethnic-racial minoritization of indigenous inhabitants is precisely what one finds not only in the settlement of the Virginia colony but also throughout the imperial-colonial project of the Western powers. Interestingly enough, Davidson argues, only one voice in the narrative speaks in protest, that of God in 21:9—but such a protest is not pursued. In the end, it is postcolonial reading that exposes and critiques the dynamics and mechanics of the ideological vision and program at work.

## Timothy J. Sandoval: Divine Condemnation of Land Appropriation

The ethnic-racial foundation invoked by Sandoval is pointed and explicit. As anchor for his reading of 1 Kgs 21, and ultimately for the task of Latinx biblical criticism as a whole, Sandoval brings together a set of principles formulated in the course of the Latinx religious-theological project. Three such principles are identified. The first is the penchant expressed by Latinx scholars for doing theology as a group, in collaborative and dialogical fashion—working together *en conjunto*. The second is the role assigned by Latinx scholars to daily life and experience as the central point of reference for doing theology—heeding and theorizing *lo cotidiano*. The third is the emphasis placed by Latinx scholars on struggle as the defining mode of daily life, along multiple fronts, and thus as a driving element in doing theology—waging *la lucha*. These principles Sandoval takes as components and expressions of Latinx subjectivity—a sense of personhood that is by no means monolithic but rather multidimensional and multidirectional. Behind this foundation lies a quest to address what a minority subjectivity can contribute to criticism as theory and practice.

From the conjunction of such principles, a way of reading is crafted: analysis of the text through dialogical reading undertaken within the context of a small but varied Latinx church group. This group embodies the principles enunciated: it is a reading together, *en conjunto*; arising from and returning to matters of daily life, *lo cotidiano*; and analyzing, in conversation with the text, impinging facets of everyday struggle, *la lucha*. For such reading, moreover, the group follows but one guiding instruction: naming whatever caught anyone's attention. In this type of reading, beyond a role as participant, Sandoval functions as mediator between the group and the academy: summarizing the insights of the discussions and theorizing such insights in critical parlance.

The reflections of the group may be outlined as follows. First, with regard to the story as story, at no time was there concern with the question of historicity or truth; yet, there was concern with history, for the story was seen as realistic. Second, in terms of content, the group was most concerned with the moral fiber of the characters and the motives behind their actions, while raising the problematic of gender. Thus, given his communitarian values, Naboth is lauded as a moral exemplar. Further, the typical characterization of Jezebel as a sexualized manipulator was found to have no basis in the text but to be the result instead of masculine stereotypes of confident women. Third, in terms of message, the group readily identified



with the view of God as active in the world and as providing for the community. Last, with regard to significance, the group affirmed the relevance of the story for their lives, drawing multiple parallels between features of the story and elements of their daily struggles. Such a reading Sandoval describes as the result of a hybrid subjectivity—somewhat preliberal and somewhat postliberal, with remnants of liberalism.

Such subjectivity, Sandoval argues, has an important role to play in contemporary biblical hermeneutics, where it has been ignored by dominant criticism and where it can mark a path ahead for criticism. At the center of dominant criticism, historical criticism has long held sway, with a focus on rationality and historicism. This signifies the liberal subjectivity and the location of singular meaning in texts and contexts. At its right, one finds a postcritical strand, a return of sorts to the precritical phase. Here the question of meaning has the readers in mind, and the texts are viewed as providing a compass for life, to be treated with deference. This signifies a postliberal subjectivity and a return to religious discourse and communities. To its left, one finds a postmodern strand, a turn to ideology. Here the question of power impacts on meaning, and the texts are viewed as sites of struggle, in need of moral critique. This signifies a postmodern subjectivity and an affiliation with like-minded individuals. None of these paths has given heed to minority faces and voices—they all remain different facets of dominant criticism.

What this type of Latinx reading, in itself characteristic of other minority criticisms, represents is a hybrid position: with liberalism, it shares an interest in matters historical, but not on historicity; alongside postliberalism, it expresses respect for religious meaning and affirmation of divine presence; with postmodernism, it reveals an interest in matters ideological. This reading position is quite in keeping with its own hybrid status in society and culture. As such, from the circles of the excluded, the periphery, and the margins, Sandoval offers a path forward for criticism to unfold—a more-than-liberal approach whose aim it is to decenter the dominant mode of interpretation. With it comes a need to rethink its forms of argumentation and its ways of presentation.

Angeline M. G. Song: Affirmation of Land as Place to Stand

In reading 1 Kgs 21, Song brings together closely ethnic-racial context and critical approach. This she does in addressing a fundamental shift in attitude toward the figure of Naboth and his rejection of Ahab regarding the



vineyard. This change of opinion she records as follows. In earlier times, she had perceived Naboth as an idealistic fool, with an evaluation of his stance as inflexible, misguided, and dangerous—a veritable act of suicide. Nowadays, she views him as a principled advocate, with an assessment of his response as rooted, confident, and spiritual—an admirable act of standing tall. Song explains this shift in terms of a change in context, showing thereby how the two go hand in hand. What follows is a critical analysis of context, which yields, in turn, a critical analysis of approach.

The context is complex, encompassing three phases of her life, in each of which shifting facets of identity and feelings of otherness develop. Her analysis is no less complex, since it involves detailed attention to the various historical-spatial and social-cultural dimensions of this trajectory, phase by phase. Against this backdrop, the contrasting attitudes toward Naboth are situated. The early view of Naboth as a fool is associated with the first two phases of her life, while the later view of him as an advocate is tied to the third and present phase. The pivot is identified as an experience of migration on her part, which brings about a number of personal and critical developments on her part. The entire process is theorized as follows.

The first two phases are set in her native Singapore, during the post-colonial period that follows independence from the United Kingdom. The first phase involves a passage from unknown origins, as a female child given up for adoption by an impoverished family within a patriarchal framework, into a family of Paranakan or Straits Chinese heritage, a formation of combined Malay and Chinese ancestries, with long-standing presence in the island. This phase accounts for an otherness of not-knowing—a fundamental sense of rootlessness in the world. The second phase brings appropriation of the social-cultural ethos of this hybrid ethnic group, a conflicted process in the light of geopolitical developments. To begin with, during the time of the British Empire, from the 1820s through the 1950s, the Paranakan came to play an intermediary role between the British and the Malay, embracing Anglo-loyalism and wielding considerable power. Subsequently, with the advent of independence, from the 1960s onwards, the Paranakan were pushed toward an outsider role, given the nationalist claims advanced by the native Malays and the now-dominant Chinese. The ethos that she imbibes as a citizen of the new nation, therefore, is a mix of socially Chinese and culturally British. This phase evokes an otherness of not-belonging—a persistent sense of fraudulence in the world as a Paranakan, which by this time entails a bifurcated personhood.

The last phase takes place in her adopted, predominantly Western, Aotearoa New Zealand. Here, she has to navigate, as an immigrant from Southeast Asia, the divide between the dominant formation of white Europeans and the minority formation of indigenous Māori—the result of the imperial-colonial project of Great Britain. This phase adds a further otherness of not-fitting—a distinct, twofold sense of minoritization in the world, as both nonwhite and non-Māori. With this experience of migration, however, the cumulative sense of otherness comes to a climax and engenders a change in conscientization, both as an individual and as a critic. What brings this about is contact with the indigenous otherness of the Māori. As an individual, this leads to a keen sense of self-awareness and self-scrutiny; as a critic, it yields a creative mix of other-empathic reading, postcolonial sensitivity, and social commitment. In effect, she witnesses and undergoes a Naboth-like moment, which upends, among many things, her reading of 1 Kgs 21.

Her initial reading was tied to her context in Singapore. This involves a pragmatic attitude toward the land: the state may claim land on the basis of national interest. Such pragmatism was grounded in the postindependence period, with survival and progress of the country in mind. This situation touched her directly, given the enforced sale of family land in the past and burial property in the present. From this point of view, Naboth's refusal was regarded as hopeless—pragmatism is in order. Her subsequent reading is tied to her context in New Zealand. This involves a commodity attitude toward the land: developers seek to purchase land for the sake of construction projects. Such commodification is rooted in contemporary real-estate practices, with profit and the market in mind. This situation touches her indirectly, through acquaintance with a Māori family that refuses to sell, in order to preserve ancestral land, in the light of family and religious connections, against encroachment. From this perspective, Naboth's refusal is viewed as commendable—resistance is in order. Thus, empathic understanding of an indigenous situation in New Zealand led to an other-empathic reading of the indigenous predicament facing Naboth. It is not only a question of preserving ancestral lands entrusted by God, as a standard religious-theological interpretation would have it. Above all, this is a question of preserving a sense of one's standing in place.

In addition, change also surfaced the problematic of imperial-colonial relations. This revealed the specters of the past still at work in the present, as in the enduring differential relations of power between European New Zealanders and native Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand and the ongoing

demand for land. Last, the change further brought about a critical way of being with a twofold imperative. The first is a call to resist dominant constructions of knowledge and to forge instead a knowledge that draws on her multidimensional sense of identity. The second is a call to listen to and dialogue with other oppressed peoples of the world. That this applies to the past as well is clear from her brief, intriguing question regarding the presence and fate of the workers in the vineyard, consigned to silence. In the end, what this change does is to give her trajectory of otherness a constructive turn—marked by self-determination, recovery of the past, and solidarity with others.

#### Nasili Vaka'uta: Affirmation of Land as Ancestral

The ethnic-racial foundation embraced by Vaka'uta is set forth from the start and at length. Such grounding bears a particular as well as a general dimension. The former angle functions as primary. He describes himself as a migrant in Aotearoa New Zealand, which thus constitutes his present context in life and in criticism. Here he belongs neither to the dominant European framework nor to the minority Māori formation. The latter angle plays a supporting role. He identifies himself as a native of the kingdom of Tonga in Polynesia, and thus as someone who shares the imperial-colonial heritage or rule, as the case may be, with other lands and peoples of Oceania—including Aotearoa and the Māori. As an indigenous migrant scholar from Tonga in Aotearoa, Vaka'uta places himself alongside the indigenous Māori, both historically and epistemically. What Vaka'uta advances, therefore, is a reading from a Māori perspective, as an expression of solidarity among indigenous groups.

Theoretically, this reading proceeds along two lines, closely interrelated. First, it is described as contextual. As such, it places certain demands on the critic: analysis of the interpretive context, delineation of the driving questions at the heart of this context, identification of one's reading community and perspective, and disclosure regarding the aims of reading. Second, it is defined as a reading with the Māori. Thus, it calls for engagement with this context along the lines set forth. This Vaka'uta pursues through the lens of identity and the centrality of land for such a sense of identity. In so doing, he surfaces key features of the land for Māori identity: a point of connection with the divine world and among family generations; a source of spiritual empowerment; and a place on which to stand and speak.

Methodologically, this reading approaches the text along two directions, loosely interrelated. The first involves a literary analysis of the story along formalist and ideological lines. This analysis has nothing to do, formally, with a Māori perspective. He attends, on the one hand, to narrative features of story: overall structure, plot development, settings, and characterization. He also attends, on the other hand, to narrative features of discourse: point of view, which leads to an exposition of the agenda at work. The second direction involves a reading of the features thus examined through a Māori vision of land and identity.

The literary analysis foregrounds the element of characterization, addressing the representation of all three major figures. First, Naboth is solidly placed within the religious tradition of Israel by upholding the covenant: God forbids the sale of ancestral land. Naboth is portrayed as faithful to God, reminding the monarch of his responsibilities with regard to the land. Second, Jezebel is squarely situated within the religious tradition of attack regarding foreign women in Israel. She is the one who devises an expedient political strategy for violent appropriation of land: false charges, unjust execution, outright confiscation. Her representation, therefore, is as a controlling and dangerous feminine other. Last, Ahab is entirely placed within the religious tradition of failing kings in Israel. He is a king without authority, under the influence of the foreign and idolatrous queen. He is depicted as a unique exemplar of evil in Israel, having turned to other gods following the lead of Jezebel. In the end, Vaka'uta argues, the unit presents Naboth and Ahab as figures in opposition: the former turns to God; the latter follows after other gods.

The Māori reading centers on the dispute over ancestral land. It draws throughout a parallel between the literary-narrative events portrayed in 1 Kgs 21 and the historical-political events in Māori life and experience. This correspondence is extensive, placing in juxtaposition the various attitudes displayed toward the land by the characters in the story and the various attitudes at play in the imperial-colonial trajectory of the Māori. In such a reading, the Māori have much in common with Naboth, while the imperial-colonial project shares much with Ahab and Jezebel. What 1 Kgs 21 reveals from a Māori perspective is a defense of indigenous ancestral land as a standpoint, a source of life and power, and a bond with family, creation, the gods. For Vaka'uta, this type of reading represents a rupture with Eurocentric modes of interpretation, turning to real life and gaining relevance for real people.

## Gale A. Yee: Unlawful Confiscation of Land and Deployment of Otherization

Yee comes to the text with the problematic of minority criticism, phrased in terms of Asian American criticism, foremost in mind. Her concern lies with the singularity of focus that such criticism is taken to represent. Given a complex critical trajectory, the question is the feasibility, indeed the wisdom, of pursuing an ethnic-racial lens of inquiry apart from matters of gender or economics, from historical, literary, or social models of criticism. This question is not addressed directly but indirectly. There is no theoretical discussion of this issue, but there is a practical execution of such a reading. This exercise shows what such criticism signifies for Yee: drawing historical-political analogies between the past of the biblical texts and the trajectory of Asian American life. Drawing such parallels entails critical analysis of both the text and the ethnic-racial groups in question.

Two such parallels are proposed with respect to 1 Kgs 21: the unlawful confiscation of land by government authorities and the dialectical representation of outsiders as others. Both allow for an Asian American reading, though along different lines, given the diversity of Asian American life. With regard to appropriation, the parallel involves the fate of Japanese Americans during the Second World War. With respect to stereotyping, it concerns the attitude toward Chinese Americans in society and culture at large. While Yee pursues both as an Asian American, it is with the second analogy that she embraces her own ethnic-racial heritage as a Chinese American.

In the case of confiscation, the point of comparison rests on attempts by ruling authorities to deprive subjects of property in underhanded ways. For Asian Americans, this provides the basis for a minority reading from the perspective of Japanese Americans. With regard to the text, this line of inquiry resorts to sociocultural criticism to analyze the value of land in the Jezreel Valley as context for the story. With regard to the group, it examines the social-cultural trajectory of the group—as representative of Asian Americans—as a minority formation with a focus on immigration policies and ethnic-racial disposition. What this analysis reveals is a long-standing process of minoritization at work, with this particular development as salient signifier and bridge to the text.

The connection proceeds as follows. On one side, there is the policy of dispossession from land and property adopted by the US government in the aftermath of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, involving summary roundup, internment in prison camps, and substantial

loss of wealth. On the other side, there is the ploy toward dispossession from the vineyard concocted by Jezebel and Ahab, including violence. Further, in both cases deviousness prevails. The ploy targeting Naboth has recourse to false charges, rigged proceedings, and willing collaborators. The policy aimed at Japanese Americans relies on unfounded suspicions, absence of due process, and civil acquiescence, if not consent and collaboration.

In the case of representation, the point of comparison lies on deployment by dominant frameworks of the strategy of otherization. For Asian Americans, this provides the key to a minority reading from the perspective of Chinese Americans. With respect to the text, this line of inquiry turns to literary and historical criticism to examine the ideology of characterization in and the redactional history of the text. With respect to the group, it analyzes the social-cultural path of Chinese Americans—as representative of Asian Americans—as a minority formation, with similar emphasis on immigration policies and ethnic-racial hostility, but drawing on Yee's own personal history and the cultural repertoire provided by visual and literary production. What this analysis shows is an ongoing process of minoritization at work, with demeaning stereotyping—shifting and conflictive—as a constant and a bridge to the text.

The connection runs as follows. To one side, one finds, as one variation among many, an alienating construction of Chinese American femininity and masculinity along the lines of Dragon Lady and Fu Manchu, respectively: women as duplicitous, dangerous, and seductive; men as conniving, villainous, and ambiguous. To the other side, one finds, at one redactional layer, an alienating construction of the biblical characters as follows: Jezebel as cunning, ruthless, masculinized; Ahab as ineffective, subservient, feminized.

While the first parallel concentrates on the plot, the second focuses on characterization. In the former case, Ahab and Jezebel signify the power of the state—arbitrary, dangerous, self-serving. In the latter case, they serve as the target of otherization. For Yee, Asian Americans, as a minority formation, can connect with and bring out such different ideological dimensions of the text, since they too have known full well the misuse of power by government authorities (as Japanese Americans) and the dialectics of representation by dominant frameworks (as Chinese Americans). In her appropriation of Chinese American ancestry, Yee shows that such reading constitutes for her a way of living in the midst of white dominant culture and hegemonic masculinity.

## John 4: Jesus the Jew and the Samaritans of Sychar

John 4:4–42 is the story that relates a stop of Jesus in Sychar of Samaria, on the way to Galilee, which yields, first, wonderment on the part of a Samaritan woman regarding his claim as the expected Messiah, and then acceptance by the townspeople as the savior of the world. Minority readings of the story address the nature of the relationship and the mode of interaction between insiders and outsiders. In so doing, they emphasize different moments or elements of the story and advance different interpretations of its outcome.

With regard to focus of attention, the degree of variation lies within a narrow range. For the most part, the encounter with the woman at the well attracts the most interest, although in every case the encounter with the townspeople forms part of the discussion as well. Such is the way of Ronald Charles, Mary F. Foskett, and Demetrius K. Williams. In the case of David Arthur Sánchez, the focus rests more or less equally on both the woman and the townspeople. For Mitzi J. Smith, the motif of water becomes primary, although it is used as a link to the woman as well as to the townspeople. With respect to the mode of relation, the degree of variation is much broader. While all subscribe to the view that the story signifies a rupture of existing religious-theological divisions between Jews and Samaritans, most—Foskett, Smith, and Williams—see this as a yielding on both sides, while some—Charles and Sánchez—view it as solely unidirectional.

In terms of ideological critique, the range of evaluation is as wide as it can get. Toward one end of the spectrum, there is outright rejection of the import of the story. Charles and Sánchez prove unsparing in this regard: the story stands for capitulation by one of the parties, the Samaritans, in the traversing of existing walls. Toward the other end of the spectrum, there is unquestioned acceptance of the message of the story and its ramifications. Foskett and Smith are effusive in this regard: the story stands for give-and-take between the parties involved, and that includes the figure of Jesus. Standing in the middle, much closer to the approving pole, stands Williams. While clearly adhering to the view of mutual yielding, and wholeheartedly so, he does acknowledge the opposite position, not in order to argue against it, but rather for the sake of awareness regarding the diversity of interpretation.

## Ronald Charles: Jesus as Superior and the Samaritans as Inferior

Charles's engagement with John 4 bears a twofold social-cultural imprint. He defines his reading in terms of his status as Haitian Canadian, an immigrant



from Haiti in Canada, and a native of Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti. He characterizes reading as “from away”—carried out in and from a context of distantiation and estrangement, both external and internal. From the outside, such awayness reveals multiple levels within the Canadian context, given his academic location in Nova Scotia. Neither Scottish nor Irish in descent, he is viewed as from away—black skin, foreign accent, from outside the country, from outside the region (Toronto). From the inside, this awayness bears several connotations as well with respect to the Haitian context, given his professional training and optic as a critic. No longer driven solely in religious-spiritual reading, he views himself as from away: out of the comfort zone; against the grain of family and friends; engaged in rigorous analysis, while still moved by the text; questioning all, yet still grasping on to mystery. What emerges is a riven reading, at once disturbing and liberating—yet unavoidable and imperative.

This reading project feeds on a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives. First, it constitutes an exercise in reader response, which activates a strategy of pretending to read the unit as if it were for the first time. This entails following the plot, not knowing what comes after at any one moment. In so doing, the focus is on the interaction between the leading characters. Second, the reading represents an exercise in autobiographical criticism, in which the first-time reader is not an abstract construct but a real reader. This implies following the interaction from a personal and contextual perspective, as a Haitian Canadian minoritized scholar in the diaspora. The result is a reading of oneself alongside the reading of the text. Last, it constitutes an exercise in comparative criticism, which brings an episode from the early colonization of Haiti to bear on the interchange. This involves a similar encounter between a foreign dominant male and a native subject female. This analogy is used to reinforce the unfolding interpretation of the interaction.

What emerges from this reading is a dialectic of inclusion and exclusion in ethnic-racial relations: on the one hand, a “we” that is embodied in Jesus, who signifies knowledge; on the other hand, a “you” that is represented by the woman, who stands for ignorance. Working his way through the plot and the series of interchanges between Jesus and the woman, Charles exposes the dialectic at work throughout. To one side, the male and Jewish Jesus, who comes from above and is the Son of God, who can alone dispense enlightenment. To the other side, the female and Samaritan character, who hails from a local village and remains nameless, who can only accept such dispensation. To be sure, she also functions as



a type, a representative of the village as a whole and of all those beyond who lie in obfuscation.

For Charles, what this narrative encounter does at a discursive level, the historical encounter invoked from the colonization of Haiti replicates at a material level. In the sixteenth-century meeting between the Spanish governor of Quisqueya-Ayiti, Nicolás de Ovando, and the female native chieftain of the province of Xaraguá, Anacaona, this dialectic of self and other proceeds by way of dispossession through deceit, violence, and murder. What happens in John 4 at the level of epistemic nullification, therefore, can happen at other levels as well, including physical elimination. Indeed, this is what happens as well at the level of social-cultural marginalization of minorities, including, as in his own case, minority biblical critics.

What the reading from away seeks to do is to interrupt this dialectic of self and other by challenging its strategies of flattening and hierarchization. This Charles carries out in various ways. First, he points out how the exclusive focus of John 4 on salvation through Jesus leaves aside all other social and cultural dimensions behind the encounter. How does such knowledge address the needs and problems, the oppression and marginalization, of the other—whether the Samaritan, present-day women, or those in the periphery? Second, he rescues the figure of Anacaona, as one who offered resistance rather than acquiescence to colonization, as a cultural memory for opposition to any dialectic of inclusion and exclusion. Third, he reimagines the scene at the well by way of Anacaona and Jesus, yielding a critical dialogue between the two, in which the claims of Jesus to superiority are challenged and ultimately rejected. In the end, a reading from away is one that opposes oppressive structures of all sorts, including those advanced by the biblical texts, and does so in the name of the God of justice and liberation recalled from his early days of religious-spiritual reading.

Mary F. Foskett: Jesus and the Samaritans as Expanding Boundaries

Foskett uses her social-cultural context as point of entry into the text, going on to draw an analogy between the world of today, the narrative of her life, and the world of antiquity, the narrative of John. This context she presents as having a twofold dimension: Asian Americans in general and Asian Americans adoptees in particular. Both are viewed as grounded in and subject to the same dynamics and mechanics of external perception—the gaze of the dominant framework, which is consumed by curiosity

regarding identity and which writes on their lives narratives of their own concoction. Thus, Asian Americans remain captive to the imposed ethnic-racial stereotypes of model minority and perpetual foreigner. Similarly, Asian American adoptees are trapped by ethnic-racial stereotypes of cultural identity, both well-meaning (mythical heritage) and ill-intentioned (inferior heritage).

This latter connection—the situation of adoptees born in East and Southeast Asia (mostly China and Korea) and raised by white families in the United States—allows Foskett to foreground the link to the Samaritan woman. Such, in effect, is said to have been the fate of the Samaritan woman in scholarship: a figure taken to-and-from, in mostly negative fashion (along lines of ethnicity, gender, or sexuality) by the gaze of critics, taken as a foil to highlight a positive aspect of Jesus. This point in common—this trajectory of intense curiosity and confining demarcations—serves as the critical foundation for the analogy. From such a context, then, a way of responding is forged, and from this response, in turn, a way of approaching texts in general, and thus biblical texts as well, is constructed—reading as an Asian American adoptee. Both moves are anchored in the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour.

Against narrow confinements and static configurations of the social-cultural domain as well as of identity formation, network theory advances a view of both, context and personhood, as multiconnected and dynamic. This is what the term network seeks to capture and express, beyond fixed social contexts and static social forces. Networks constitute the world—the whole range of processes, practices, and organization—that human beings inhabit as well as produce. On the one hand, networks are expansive: they involve actors, human and nonhumans, who navigate alongside and interact with a host of other actors. On the other hand, networks are flexible: the host of actors involved and the set of effects produced are always in motion.

Consequently, argues Foskett, network theory can be fruitfully applied to the adoption process of Asian Americans, allowing for a much broader sense of identity, and to literature, allowing for a much wider view of sociality, as in the case of the Samaritan woman as a character. In both cases, and in all cases, what network theory does is to tear asunder imposed barriers and open up instead myriad interconnections. The result is a sense of personhood that, while embedded in networks, can also move toward transformation and redirection. Just as network theory leads to a different conception of identity for adoptees, one that embraces a variety of kinship

networks, so does it yield a different view of the Samaritan woman, one that encompasses a number of social networks.

This approach is carried out by a combination of close reading, following the interchange between the key actors, and genre analysis, taking the unit as an example of a hospitality story. What emerges is an encounter where Jesus and the woman engage one another and edge one another toward a new knowledge and a new attachment. In so doing, a new network of reciprocity and hospitality emerges, in which they both take part, without erasure of their previous networks. Through the encounter, Jesus expands the boundaries of those who worship in spirit in the world by welcoming the Samaritans (including the woman), and the woman (along with the Samaritans) expands the boundaries of expectations in the world to embrace Jesus as the savior of the world. In the end, what network theory brings out, for Asian American adoptees and Samaritan woman alike, is a move away from stereotypes and generalizations toward complexity and particularity.

David Arthur Sánchez: Jesus as Missionary and the Samaritans  
as Mission Field

In approaching John 4:4–42, Sánchez offers a vision and a project for ethnic-racial minority criticism in terms of marronage. In so doing, he invokes a term from the times of African slavery in the imperial-colonial frameworks of the Americas that signifies enslaved Africans who have run away from the plantations and have formed instead hidden settlements of their own. With regard to vision, minority critics are maroons who have taken leave of the methodological repertoires and theoretical frameworks of dominant criticism and have opted instead for a contextual-ideological stance in criticism. With regard to project, they are maroons who seek to disrupt and displace the production and structures of dominant knowledge systems and to develop instead alternative structures and production for knowledge systems of their own. For Sánchez, such contrarian undertaking constitutes a program of resistance and replacement.

This program is clearly at work in his reading of the encounter between Jesus and the woman of Samaria. First, he undertakes a critical analysis of the traditional trajectory of interpretation. This he does by exposing the contextual and ideological slant behind the normative tradition. Then, he advances a critical analysis from his own contextual and ideological location as a Chicano critic. This he carries out in two moves.

First, he filters the interchange through a different set of critical lenses. Second, he reinforces this alternative optic through recourse to historical sources. On the one hand, he appeals to a similar episode from the imperial-colonial framework involving Spain and Mexico in the early sixteenth century. This involves a gendered relation between dominant male foreigners and a minoritized female native. On the other hand, he recalls the gendered portrayal of Rome's victory over its conquered enemies in Roman artistic representations.

The analysis of the scholarly tradition reveals a focus on the religious-theological dimension of the encounter. With regard to the woman in particular, the encounter is read as a process of conversion: the triumph of the superior Jewish Jesus over the inferior Samaritan woman. With regard to the Samaritans in general, it is taken as process of mission: the triumph of the foreign good news of Jesus over the local beliefs of the townspeople of Sychar. The dominant tradition thus follows the ideological presentation of Jesus in the gospel as the Word of God, before whom the world stands in need of transformation. Over against this normative tradition, Sánchez argues for a different focus on other relations of power at work in the unit, namely, the hierarchical dynamics of gender and ethnicity-race. Such a call is grounded in a Chicano optic, as a son of Mexico. It is a perspective shaped by a historical-political tradition marked by domination in Mexico as well as in the United States. The result is ideological critique, not submission.

What this critique advances is a reading of the unit as a keen example of manifest destiny. This unit represents a mandate for mission in Samaria—a mission aggressive and sexualized to a land exoticized and feminized. With respect to the woman, what emerges is a rhetorical exercise in sexual shaming and gender violence: a woman classified as a sexual deviant, used as a temporary vessel to the townspeople, and discarded when needed no longer. With respect to the Samaritans, what surfaces is a rhetorical exercise in ethnic-racial marginalization and cultural domination: a people to be subdued under the new world order embodied by the foreign Jesus. Both characters are represented, in different but related ways, as in need of transformation through the living water supplied by the Word of God.

The same dialectical relation along gendered and ethnic-racial lines Sánchez finds in two other historical frameworks. The dialectic appears in the conquest of the Aztecs by the Spanish, signified by the relation between a series of Spanish conquistadors, including Hernán Cortés, and a woman from the Nahua indigenous group, who serves as vessel for the superior

knowledge and power of Spain. She becomes known by the highly pejorative designation of *la malinche*—the native woman who sold out to the foreigner. The dialectic also appears in the conquest of other peoples by the Romans, conveyed by the artistic representations of such triumphs in terms of masculine victories over feminized lands, which serve as vessels for the superior power and knowledge of Rome. For Sánchez, John 4 is no different. As a Chicano male, a son of Mexico, of mixed race and looked down upon, there is no option but to read John 4 along these lines and to reject outright such a violation of a woman, a people, and a land—not only in the text as such, but also in its reception through Christian history.

Mitzi J. Smith: Jesus and the Samaritans as Breaking Boundaries

The element of water serves for Smith as the point of reference for reading the text. Water supplies the connection between her context as a reader in the world of today and the context of the text in the world of antiquity. In terms of her location as a critic in the United States, the water in question is real. The issue concerns its availability and distribution in the public sphere by government authorities. In terms of the location of the gospel in the Roman Empire, the water in question is real as well as metaphorical. At one level, for Jesus and the Samaritan woman, the question has to do with its availability and accessibility from the well. At another level, for Jesus and the Samaritan woman as well as for the townspeople, water involves its possession and dispensation by Jesus, as savior of the world. What brings both contexts together for Smith is the character of water as indispensable for life and its recognition as a human right.

Smith uses her context as point of entry. To begin with, she speaks in local terms within the United States, with reference to the city of Detroit and the acute water crisis that came to a head in the 2010s, in the wake of the Great Recession of 2008. Ultimately, however, she views this situation as universal in scope—applicable to the state of Michigan, the country at large, and indeed the world as a whole. This, she argues, was a crisis not of supply but rather of access: the high cost of its distribution by government as a public resource. Consequently, the crisis had differential ramifications along economic lines: those who could not afford to pay—and there were many such people in Detroit—had their supply cut off. In effect, it affected the poor above all, and the result was a humanitarian crisis. The point is taken to apply throughout the nation and the globe, accentuated by a worldwide trend toward the privatization of water as a for-

profit recourse. In Detroit, the crisis affected, above all, African American women with children.

Given such grounding, Smith brings together a theoretical mix of womanism and postcolonialism as framework for analysis. From womanist tradition, she takes its attention to the conjunction of race, gender, and economics in the oppression of African American women. In keeping with this tradition, this multidimensional lens is extended to comprehend the oppression of minorities everywhere. From postcolonial thought, she adopts its focus on imperial-colonial frameworks as the foundation for such relations and structures of oppression. This geopolitical lens is taken to encompass such systems across time and space. Behind this critical lens, she argues, lies the pursuit of justice and wholeness. This has the present in mind—not only African American women, and the group in general, but also the global community. Smith also has the past in mind—the contestation over water in the Roman Empire, as reflected in the text.

Concerning the present, Smith espouses access to water as a human right, siding with the position of the United Nations in this regard. Water is a resource that must be available to all—affordably or freely so—regardless of race, gender, or class. This she does in opposition to a conception of water as a for-profit commodity within a neo-imperial-neocolonial context of capitalism, which leads to exclusion of the marginalized on account of race, gender, and class. Concerning antiquity, Smith describes the conflicted nature of water, regarding possession as well as access, under the imperial-colonial context of Rome, which also results in exclusion of the marginalized by way of race, gender, and class. In opposition to this differential understanding of water, she argues, stands John 4.

The unit represents a story of hospitality. At the material level, boundaries are broken. Jesus, as a Jew, seeks a drink of water from this well of the Samaritans and from the hand of this woman in particular. In response, the woman raises the question of ethnic-racial differentiation. Then, Jesus, as savior of the world, offers the woman a drink of living water. In response, the woman accepts the invitation and moves beyond the ethnic-racial divide as well. For Smith, both characters recognize thereby the resource of water as a human right. At the metaphorical level, barriers are broken as well. Jesus, as savior of the world, offers the water of life eternal, first to the woman and then to the townspeople. Salvation is offered thereby across ethnic-racial lines. In response, the townspeople—no mention of the woman—accept Jesus, a Jew, as the savior of the world. In so doing, they traverse ethnic-racial demarcations and become

worshippers of God in spirit and truth. At both levels, water is represented as a resource for all—regardless of ethnic-racial, class, or gender identity. In the end, therefore, what Smith advocates, in Detroit and elsewhere, is what she finds in the gospel—a shattering of the dialectics of inclusion-exclusion, and a move beyond the systems and structures of imperialism-colonialism.

### Demetrius K. Williams: Jesus and the Samaritans as Transgressing Boundaries

Williams's involvement with John 4 is firmly rooted in the social-cultural context of African American life as a whole and the religious-theological context of the African American Protestant tradition in particular. Within the United States, a process of dehumanization has marked the way of life for African Americans: from the system of slavery, through the ideology of white supremacy, to the development of empire. Throughout this process, the dominant group has invoked and wielded the authority of the Bible. Among African Americans, a process of rehumanization has developed in response: challenging the ideologies and conditions of oppression, and crafting visions and strategies of dignity and liberation. In this process, African Americans have also activated and deployed the authority of the Bible on their behalf. His reading of John 4 represents an exercise in this dialectic of de-/rehumanization.

What African Americans have done, in effect, is to employ a contextual—humanized—approach to the Bible: viewing the Bible as addressing the concerns of real life and bringing to the Bible their own concerns of real life. This too he seeks to do. Toward this end, the exercise draws on three critical frameworks: historical criticism, cultural studies, and post-colonial studies. From a historical perspective, the exercise addresses the social-cultural context of the text itself. This step is described as indispensable, since it prevents contemporary readers from overriding the text.

From a cultural perspective, the exercise examines the humanization of the text in the homiletical tradition of African Americans. This move is central, since it is in such ecclesial contexts that the real-life conditions of the text and the reader are brought together. From a postcolonial context, the exercise attends to the impact of imperial-colonial frameworks on the past of the text and the present of interpretation. This move is crucial, since it regards such frameworks as underlying both the message of the text and the process of humanization—the world of Rome and the world



of the United States, respectively. In Williams's reading of John 4, all three dimensions are largely in accord.

The historical analysis involves a close reading of the text with a focus on historical-political and religious-theological features. The encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman emerges therefrom as full of liberative potential. He views the encounter as carrying out a transgression of boundaries on the part of Jesus and the woman. First, in terms of gender relations, one finds a shattering not only of existing male-female dynamics, marked by separation, but also of the standard characterization of the woman in highly negative terms—as morally wayward. In terms of ethnic-racial relations, one finds a disruption not only of existing Jewish-Samaritan dynamics, signified by segregation and apartheid, but also of a common view of the woman in highly demeaning terms—as epistemically discarded.

While closely related, these two dimensions bear slightly different emphases. On the one hand, Jesus breaks through the gender divide by reaching out to the woman in a public space. The approach proceeds gradually, in gentle and nonjudgmental tones. The woman responds as an intelligent and informed dialogue partner, challenging and inquiring—clearly someone of good standing in the community. On the other hand, Jesus ruptures the ethnic-racial divide by offering the woman, as a Samaritan, his own gift of living water, namely, salvation from the Jews. This approach proceeds gradually as well, with disclosure building on disclosure: first, an exposition of Samaria as polytheistic in the light of its imperial-colonial trajectory; then, an anticipation of a time when worship in spirit would unite Jews and Samaritans; last, a disclosure of his identity as the expected Messiah. The woman responds as a disciple in progress—ultimately believing in Jesus as the savior of the world and becoming an apostle of Jesus to the Samaritans.

The cultural analysis traces the reception of the text by African American preachers, especially in the womanist tradition of preaching, through the lens of the African American story and experience. This tradition, he finds, has captured well the liberative potential of the text. The combination of story and experience highlights the similarities in dehumanization between the woman and African Americans, especially women, bringing out the multiple levels of marginalization at work in both cases, with racial-religious inferiority at the core. It has also highlighted the similarities in rehumanization for the woman and African Americans, especially women, through Jesus, pointing out the process of humanization at work in both cases, with breaking boundaries and restoring dignity at its heart.



The postcolonial analysis shows the reach of imperial-colonial frameworks on both the encounter and its interpretation. With respect to the text, Williams not only follows the view of the woman as an embodied representative of the imperial-colonial trajectory of Samaria but also ponders a view of Jesus, the savior of the world, as a call to break through colonial boundaries. With respect to interpretation, Williams endorses the importance of the encounter for subject peoples, including African Americans. At the same time, he foregrounds a division among women critics from subject peoples around the world. While some read the encounter as an expression of colonization, others take it as a critique of it. This division becomes, for Williams, a matter of context. While he sides with the latter, positive strand, he argues that the former, negative strand must be kept in mind as a challenge. In the end, however, from his own African American context, Jesus stands as a liberator who crosses boundaries in order to rehumanize a dehumanized sister at the well and dehumanized readers throughout the world.

#### Revelation 18: The Followers of the Lamb and the Followers of Babylon

Revelation 18 is the unit that envisions the demise and destruction of Babylon the Great, a covert designation for Rome and the Empire, and posits, in the course of this unveiling, a division between insiders and outsiders, the people of God and the associates of Babylon. The approaches to this unit proceed along two different lines of inquiry, equally divided among the four critics. In effect, the readings take up different components of the process of spatial-geographical displacement and dissolution. In so doing, one finds agreement as well as disagreement regarding the interpretation of the components in question. In one case, the two critics advance considerably different renditions; in the other case, both critics are in fundamental accord.

In terms of object of inquiry, one finds a division between literary characterization and rhetorical appeal. Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder and Miranda N. Pillay attend to the figure of Babylon, highlighting its representation as a woman and a prostitute, the great whore, who is depicted as riding atop the scarlet beast. Roberto Mata and Raj Nadella, on the other hand, center on the summons of the second angel to the people of God, commanding them to come out of the city. In terms of interpretive stance, there is disagreement on the depiction of Babylon, but agreement on the character of the summons. Thus, with regard to the portrayal of

Babylon as a prostitute, Crowder argues for a positive aspect, while Pillay sees it as altogether negative. However, with respect to the command of the angel, both Mata and Nadella regard it as absolute, uncompromising in tone and import.

On the matter of ideological assessment, the spectrum emerges as quite sharp. That is certainly the case with the sexualized portrayal of Babylon. Crowder places its description as a prostitute and as a mother side-by-side. This juxtaposition she finds decisive: this woman does what she has to do for the sake of the children, given the patriarchal context—an element worth retrieving. Pillay exposes the way in which the Seer has cast Babylon in the role of feminized evil. Such stereotyping she finds deplorable: this woman gets what she deserves for forgetting her place within the patriarchal system—nothing worth retrieving. Such is also the case with the inflexible summons of the angel. Mata sees the command as an ideological tool of the Seer, one that works to his own benefit but to the detriment of followers of the Lamb, insofar as they strive for survival as believers within the imperial context—a ploy to be resisted at all cost. Nadella takes it as a way of breaking with the unjust economic policies of the imperial system and its devastating consequences for the colonies—a directive to be embraced in full.

#### Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder: Retrieving the Representation of Babylon as Mother

Crowder grounds herself deeply in the ethnic-racial context of the African American community, specifically so in terms of the women in this community, and pointedly so in terms of the mothers within this group. This context she addresses both indirectly and directly. With regard to African American women in general, she draws on the model of womanism put forward by Alice Walker, an African American writer and activist, subsequently developed along religious-theological lines by a tradition of scholarship. With regard to African American mothers in particular, she appeals to her own experience as a mother as well as her research on mothers in the biblical texts and their significance for today. Both perspectives she brings together in a model of critical analysis on which she bestows the rubric of womanist maternal thought.

This model combines womanist analysis, with attention to the multidimensional question of race-gender-class among African American women, and maternal analysis, with attention to the question of family life among

both African American mothers and biblical mothers. The combination yields an overriding focus on African American women who are working mothers, a model with critique and liberation in mind. In the tradition of womanist thought, it seeks to expose and challenge whatever circumstances prevent the pursuit of a full and productive life. In the key of maternal thought, it has in mind a life that brings wholeness and health to children and the resources offered by biblical mothers toward this end. With this model, Crowder turns to Revelation, centering on the figure of the whore of Babylon/Rome and foregrounding her representation in Rev 17 as not only a mother but also a working mother—to wit, a mother-whore. In so doing, she seeks to ascertain, given the aim of critique and liberation, whether this biblical mother can speak to African American working mothers today.

The model is applied to the world of production and the world of reception, beginning with the latter and moving to the former. A structural similarity is posited regarding the fate of working mothers in imperial systems of patriarchy. In the case of the United States, the focus is on the actual situation of working mothers in the African American population. In the case of Rome, it is on the literary situation of the character Babylon/Rome as a working mother in the narrative world—a representation that is further taken as signifier for the actual condition of working mothers in the empire. Such correspondence involves—for many such mothers, but not for all, given class differences—a keenly oppressive and precarious state of affairs, due to the limited economic access and mobility imposed on them by the imperial systems in question.

For Crowder, the state of affairs for many African American working mothers within the American imperial system proves most trying. Not only are they, as women, the object of the triad of sexism, classism, and racism, but they also encounter, as mothers, a variety of systemic obstacles that militate against a fruitful balance of life and work, and lead to the devaluation and disintegration of familial life. In the face of such circumstances, these working mothers do whatever they have to do for the sake of the children. For the Seer, the state of affairs for the Christian communities of Asia Minor within the Roman imperial system is a most difficult one as well. His strategy is to offer a vision of encouragement and vindication. In this vision, the corrupting power and impending demise of Babylon/Rome are represented by the figure of the mother-whore, in effect, a working mother. This representation Crowder subjects to ideological critique, laying bare its patriarchal construction and reflection of the fragile conditions of many working mothers in the imperial system.

The mother-whore emerges as an object of desire and control, both by the scarlet beast, who drives her to and from on its back, and the triad of kings-merchants-seafarers of the earth, who benefit from her. She also emerges as a subject in control. This position of abuse she assumes by choice and turns to sharp advantage, acquiring immense riches and power—for the sake of the many children she has engendered through such liaisons, all destined for prostitution themselves. She works the system, and she does it out of love. In the end, however, she pays dearly for such a path of agency. Not only will she undergo destruction, derided by all who abused her, but also such destruction will involve grotesque cruelty.

The representation of the Seer has thus been turned on its head. Intended by the Seer as a symbol of empire, it becomes for Crowder a symbol of victimhood under empire. As such, this patriarchal depiction of a biblical working mother within the Roman imperial system does indeed have something to say to working mothers in the African American community within the American imperial system. The message is a mixed one. Like the mother-whore, they too must exercise agency, work the system, for the sake of the children. Also like the mother-whore, in working the system as StrongBlackWomen, they too will meet a not dissimilar fate at its hands. In the end, therefore, the goal of critique and liberation behind womanist maternal thought involves not only doing what it takes for the sake of familiar life, under the circumstances, but also knowing full well the truth behind the system itself, due to such circumstances.

### Roberto Mata: Challenging the Summons to Come Out of Babylon

Mata approaches Revelation from the ethnic-racial context of Latinx Americans, specifically the Mexican American population of the Southwest, from California to Texas. This group includes members with papers, citizens or residents, as well as members without papers, migrants and refugees. This context he describes indirectly rather than directly, drawing not on his own experience but rather on a theorization of this experience through the work of the late Gloria Anzaldúa (1942–2004), a prominent Chicana writer and critic.

From Anzaldúa Mata borrows the model of the borderlands. This is defined as the cultural space that lies between the United States and Mexico, over and beyond the formal border, characterized as an “open wound” in the wake of historical-political developments. In this liminal space, the Mexican American population dwells, regardless of status, as

*Atravesados* or “stuck in the middle,” from the point of view of the dominant group. For the white population, their presence is represented as the ab-normal, its Other, and hence as subject to domination and exploitation. In this space, nonetheless, Anzaldúa argues, the marginalized exercise agency and engage power.

With this model Mata turns to Revelation. In so doing, he uses the critical lens of imperial-colonial criticism as primary. This lens is applied to the world of production and the world of reception, setting up thereby a structural geopolitical correspondence between the world of antiquity, Rome, and the world of today, the United States. This correspondence, however, operates at different levels of reality: in the case of Rome, reality becomes a rhetorical scenario constructed by the Seer; in the case of the United States, reality represents a historical scenario retrieved by Mata. This correspondence involves two key components: power and survival.

In both worlds, first of all, an unequal relation of power prevails between the center and the periphery, involving domination and subordination at all levels of society and culture. As a result, there is a grating at the border, marked by conflict and violence, as the geopolitical divisions rub harshly against one another. In both worlds, moreover, a space in between emerges around the border—a borderland where ambiguity and fluidity rule. For the Seer, such grating is produced by the opposition between the kingdom of the Lamb and the empire of Rome. The borderland, in turn, encompasses the territories conquered by Rome—such as the cities of Asia Minor, where the followers of the Lamb reside. For Mata, the grating is caused by the opposition between the Global North, the United States, and the Global South, Mexico. The borderland, in turn, covers the territories annexed by the United States—the area of the Southwest, where large numbers of the Latinx population live. With the latter element enters ethnic-racial criticism as a secondary lens of inquiry.

Given this correspondence, Mata foregrounds the call of the Seer to “my people” to come out of Babylon or Rome (18:4). In the context of Rome, he takes the call as addressed to members of the Christian assemblies in Asia Minor. He also reads it as literal: a demand for physical withdrawal on the part of believers who seek to negotiate their situation as both followers of the Lamb and subjects of Rome. The Seer brooks no compromise. In the context of the United States, Mata points to a strand of interpretation that takes the call as directed to the Latinx community of the Southwest. He further shows how it is taken as literal: a demand for a similar withdrawal on the part of Latinx who are trying to work out a way

of life as both members of the group and subjects of the United States. Such a reading rules out any compromise as well. In both cases, therefore, the ambiguity and fluidity at the heart of the borderlands are attacked. Mata demurs. Instead, he goes directly against both the Seer and any literal reading of his call, well-meaning as it may be, by viewing such a call as scriptural and liberative.

To begin with, one must analyze the rhetorical situation and aim of Revelation. What emerges is a struggle in the communities: the Seer stands for dialectical opposition, while others opt for accommodation. The Seer deploys a dialectical rhetorical strategy: equating such believers with those who subscribe to the empire of Rome, threatening them with violence and exclusion when the kingdom of the Lamb arrives, and warning them to live now as if this kingdom were already in place, thus following his own example of self-withdrawal. For the Latinx population of the Southwest, regardless of status or documentation, any such course of action would be counterproductive. In so doing, they would bow to the wishes of the dominant group: whether by way of self-deportation, adopting the grand strategy of removal employed by politicians of the Republican Party, or self-distantiation, bowing to the nativist-xenophobic and ethnicist-racist ideology of dominant whiteness. To the contrary, Mata argues, the community is to continue working out its way, a way of challenge and resistance—along the lines advanced by Anzaldúa.

#### Raj Nadella: Embracing the Summons to Come Out of Babylon

Raj Nadella's approach to Rev 18 brings together a set of three critical approaches: one proves dominant, another is dependent, and the third is encompassing. The primary angle of vision I describe as materialist criticism: a focus on the economic structures and practices in place within world systems. The secondary angle is represented by ethnic-racial criticism: a focus on the center and the periphery within such systems—how minoritized groups are perceived by and relate to the center amid such structures and practices. The overarching angle of vision involves imperial-colonial criticism: a focus on the world systems as imperial-colonial frameworks. All three approaches belong to the paradigm of ideological criticism.

The encompassing approach sets up a fundamental comparison and connection between the world of antiquity and the world of today. On the one hand, there is the world system of Rome, the world of produc-

tion of the text; on the other hand, there is the world system of the United States, the world of reception of the text. Thus, Revelation emerges from and addresses the Roman Empire, while Nadella stands within and applies Revelation to the American empire. What allows such application is a two-fold move: first, a similarity in economic systems, and second, a similarity in the status of minorities within such systems. The character of these minorities differs: in the case of Revelation, these are religious-theological groups—the followers of the Lamb in the Christian assemblies of Asia; in the case of the United States, they are primarily ethnic-racial groups—above all, Asian Americans from South Asia, namely, Indian Americans.

For Nadella the move is from the historical to the contemporary. Against the context of Rome, Revelation undertakes a severe ideological critique by way of *exposé* as well as prediction. The Seer lays bare not only its unjust economic structures, extractive and centripetal, with devastating consequences for the colonies, but also its impending demise, with dire consequences for all those who shared in and benefited from the imperial system. These are the kings, merchants, and sailors of the earth: they now stand aghast, with no outlet for their luxury goods and no means for material profit. Within the context of the United States, Nadella advances a sharp ideological critique by way of *exposé* as well. He foregrounds not so much the oppressive economic structures of the imperial system, which he does take for granted, but rather its grounding in an ideology of whiteness, with nefarious consequences for all others. These include the ethnic-racial groups of the country on whose backs the system runs: they find themselves excluded from and marginalized by the center.

Not all, however, for Nadella goes on to advance a damning critique of his ethnic-racial group. The link is provided by the call of the Seer to “my people”: the injunction to followers of the Lamb to come out of Rome on moral and practical grounds—to lay aside the imperial ideology of profit at the expense of others and to save themselves from the inevitable collapse of the system. These addressees he identifies as members of the assemblies who adopt a hybrid stance: following the Lamb while accommodating to the imperial system. This call Nadella takes up as his own. He addresses Indian Americans as opting for a similarly hybrid position: adopting the role of model minorities accorded by the system, over against other minority groups, as a way of seeking the benefits of whiteness. He frames this call to come out of the United States on moral and practical grounds—refusing to bow to the ideology of profit built on the margins and to lose themselves in the process.



To achieve this transhistorical comparison and connection, Nadella has recourse to a variety of theoretical resources, most connected to Indian sources. For the analysis of imperial structures and practices, he relies on the work Amartya Sen. For the critique of the hybrid position, he brings up the work of Vidiadhar Naipaul, with its focus on the desire for power by colonized communities, and again of Sen, with its focus on acquiescence to the imperial narrative by the colonized. For the exploration of the hybrid position among Asian Americans, he has recourse to cultural studies, by way of legal suits over university admissions and representation in films.

#### Amanda Pillay: Attacking the Representation of Babylon as Evil Feminized

Pillay places herself squarely within the historical-political context of South Africa over the course of the last five decades, from the 1970s to the 2010s. This trajectory she unfolds by way of a twofold axis: on one side, the system of apartheid, which defines the shifting pressures of the times; on the other hand, the appeals to Revelation, which capture the varying responses of the people of God to such pressures. Further, she argues, just as these readings of Revelation constitute responses to the pressures of their times, within the framework of South Africa, so does Revelation represent a response by the Seer to the pressures of its times, within the framework of the Roman Empire.

The trajectory has three stages. At the height of apartheid, during the 1970s and 1980s, a time of struggle prevailed, marked by despair and violence. At this point, a classic reading of Revelation, advanced by Allan Boesak, embraced it as a source of hope for the future, with social-cultural liberation in mind. At the turn of the system, in the early 1990s, a sense of possibilities abounded, given the rise of democracy and its set of promises and hopes for the times ahead. In the postapartheid period, from the 2000s to the 2010s, a feeling of disillusionment ruled, due to a pervasive sentiment of crisis. At this stage, Revelation was appropriated, again, as a source of hope for the future, though along contrary lines. Many, from among the impoverished black population, did so with transformation in mind, along personal-individualist lines, insofar as they have yet to witness the promised benefits of freedom. Some, from among the white population, did so with restoration in mind, along group-nationalist lines, insofar as they blamed freedom for all the woes of the country. For Pillay, both approaches reveal a structural similarity and call for critique; this



similarity, moreover, is both shared with and grounded in Revelation, and so the critique must extend to Revelation as well.

This critique Pillay undertakes from a threefold perspective involving religious-theological, gender-feminist, and ethnic-racial identity—rooted in a self-contextualization as a Christian woman of color in South Africa. The feminist lens functions as the driving force of this approach, set within the tradition of feminist theology and criticism, and drawing on a variety of voices and proposals. The feminist lens is further embedded within an expansive rhetorical framework, sociorhetorical approach, which calls and allows for wide application—on texts and readers as well as on their corresponding social-cultural contexts. As such, the feminist lens emerges as multidimensional in scope, interdisciplinary in orientation, and ideological in bent. This lens is closely related to the other two, on which it has a direct impact: on the religious-theological, insofar as Pillay focuses, as a Christian woman, on biblical texts and interpretations throughout; on the ethnic-racial, insofar as she subjects, as a woman of color, all readings, black or white, to ideological critique.

What this critique finds in contemporary approaches to Revelation is a patriarchal system, the rule of the fathers, which yields the dehumanization, exclusion, and oppression of women. This system it finds as well in Revelation. As a result, the system is regarded and received as divinely sanctioned, hence as hypernormative, not to be questioned but to be observed.

Pillay finds patriarchy at work in present-day appeals to Revelation: the system is mediated by male figures, black or white, who lay claim to privileged access to God and the Bible. Some promise individual health and wealth to majority South African poor who follow their message of personal transformation. Others assure group redemption via a return to God's plan to minority South African whites who subscribe to their vision of national restoration. Either way, the women of South Africa lose out. Pillay also finds patriarchy no less at work in Revelation: the system is mediated by the male figure of the Seer, who lays claim to privileged access to God and the Lamb. In a context of suffering under Rome, the Seer calls for unyielding obedience to the Lamb, through his agency, using a rhetorical strategy of fear and hope—suffering and endurance now, even destruction; victory and rejoicing later on, utter vindication. At its core, this strategy involves a dialectical feminization of evil and good. Either way, women again lose out.

Pillay concentrates on this genderized representation, beyond the demand for obedience. The element of fear is conveyed through the figure

of the woman riding on the scarlet beast, a symbol of Babylon/Rome as the great whore, the mother of prostitutes and abominations. The element of hope is conveyed through a pair of dialectical opposites: the woman who wears the crown of salvation of Rev 12, a symbol of faithfulness and obedience; and the woman who becomes the bride of the Lamb of Rev 19, a symbol of purity and worthiness. Evil feminized meets a starkly cruel end, while good feminized finds salvation. In both cases, patriarchy rules: women who do not know their place, then or now, pay a price; women who do, then or now, gain a reward. For Pillay, therefore, it is the task of a feminist lens to expose and challenge this rule of the fathers, whether in the appeals to Revelation in the South Africa of today or in the Revelation of the Seer in the Roman Empire of antiquity. Only then will women followers of the Lamb attain humanization, inclusion, and liberation—beyond patriarchy.

### Reflections from and for the Margins

#### On Genesis 21:1–20

Calderón Pilarski raises several important points for minority criticism. One of these affects all criticism, minority and dominant alike. She challenges critics to situate themselves, to define their place, within the field of studies, thus breaking down any idea of a center and a periphery. Such a scenario would require all critics to define themselves contextually and discursively. Such a move would not only allow critics to see what they themselves are doing—where, how, and why; it would also allow them to see what others are doing—where, how and why. The result would be a scenario marked throughout by critical discussions, ideological and interpretive, and intercultural engagement across all quarters—beyond any ideology of inclusion and exclusion.

The other two points affect minority criticism in particular. Given the trying circumstances of the wilderness in which they labor, minority critics are urged to focus on what others in the periphery are doing, minority critics and popular readings. Further, given the multidimensional character of oppression in the periphery, minority critics are urged to attend to the intersectional fabric of social conditions. Calderón Pilarski's work reaffirms the vision of liberation and the project of decolonization. Like liberation, minority criticism must have an ideological grounding and an analytic imperative. The aim of such criticism is to lead from oppression

to liberation. This task demands rigorous, interdisciplinary analysis of present context and future vision. Like decolonization, minority criticism must be decidedly polycentric and border-transgressing.

Havea foregrounds for minority criticism a commitment to ideological critique. Critics, he advises, are not to accept the rhetorical and ideological message of the text as determinative. They are, rather, to dissect the dynamics and mechanics of its construction in order to determine what such representation has privileged and has omitted. This dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, he reminds us, is at work throughout—in all sacred scriptures, in all social-cultural frameworks, and in all readings of critics from dominant circles and traditions. Minority critics, therefore, expose what has been ignored or buried and instead pursue alternative lines of reading. Havea further reminds minority criticism that such a commitment is grounded in and forged by historical-political trajectories, such as his own in Oceania, where the Bible has been used as a weapon of colonization and a tool of ethnic-racial or color discrimination.

What Morisada Reitz brings to minority criticism is a sharp call to stand against any and all claims to ethnic-racial purity, which wreak nothing but havoc on the lives of minoritized human beings. In so doing, he also shows the power of analyzing the foundations behind such a call in the lives of the critics themselves. This he does in his own case, exposing his status as a bastard in Hawai'i from the point of view not only of the dominant white culture but also of the migrant Japanese culture. His contribution is twofold: to remind critics that there is nothing pristine, that all is hybridized, including claims to purity and those who advance them; and to urge critics to turn hybridization into a tool for the dismantlement of such claims. Such dismantling must be carried out in all quarters: in society and culture, in the academy and the profession, and in the biblical texts themselves. In this project of bastardization, the goal envisioned for minority criticism is to lead toward the opposite of inclusion-exclusion—regard for and working with the other. If this affects the biblical text, so be it.

Darden provides a number of important pointers for the pursuit of minority criticism. The first is for critics to place themselves within their social-cultural traditions in self-conscious but critical fashion, for minority groups are not homogeneous but diverse. Minority critics must avoid essentialism and attend to diversity. A second pointer is for critics to be mindful always of their hybrid situation, but to do so in full knowledge of the grounds behind such hybridity. Minority critics must evade the

embrace of the system and analyze instead its dynamics and mechanics, so as not to embody it in themselves and toward others. A third pointer is for critics to have recourse to a variety of resources in the pursuit of their task. Minority critics must appeal not only to their theological and critical resources but also to the gamut of cultural production of their communities, such as literature. The last pointer is for critics to remember for what and for whom it is that they labor. Minority critics should labor neither for scholarship nor for themselves, but rather for the minority communities within which they are embedded.

Treadway highlights for minority criticism the value of close readings of texts as developed within the formalist tradition of criticism. Such reading may well surface a more complex and conflicted ideological stance in the text than it would appear at first sight. While one such strand may be rejected on the basis of unacceptable ethnic-racial claims, another strand may be put to good use on the grounds of more constructive claims. In so doing, neither strand is ignored. To be sure, this is formalist reading on a different key, for attention to detail is situated within a critical framework of social-cultural contextualization and ideological critique. In addition, Treadway issues a twofold important alert to minority critics: the first is to take the perspective of Native Americans, and indigenous peoples in general, seriously; the second is to ponder the value and power of working in separation from the dominant culture.

### On 1 Kings 21

Davidson brings to minority studies a key caution against any too-ready reading of texts as uniformly liberative in tone and application. What his work promotes instead is a close reading that is carefully attuned to discursive nooks and crannies that might point in dissenting directions and convey contrarian implications. Such a reading would be sensitive to both the surface and the undercurrents of the text. Three other moves are worth noting. Most important among these is the pursuit of ethnic-racial concerns not directly of one's own, but done in solidarity with other such groups. Another is the potential value of postcolonial studies for addressing certain aspects and issues of minority criticism, as in disputes over land. The third concerns the value of historical analogies across time and space in the exercise of minority criticism.

Sandoval offers minority criticism two significant contributions and challenges. The first is to develop a critical model within a broad theoretical

ambit—which in his case involves the discourse and movement of Latinx theological studies. Such contextualization lends a sense of grounding, solidity, and belonging to the undertaking. The second is to situate such a model within the broader theoretical context of interpretation—which in his case involves the recent trajectory of biblical hermeneutics in dominant scholarship. Such contextualization provides a sense of place, depth, and purpose to the enterprise. Other points should not be bypassed: taking the religious-theological dimension seriously into interpretation, considering real-reader reception, and searching for new modes of critical argumentation and presentation.

I highlight two contributions of Song to minority criticism. In the first place, she shows the immense value of doing contextual analysis of oneself as a critic, bringing out thereby how one's critical stance may be related to one's social-cultural location and may change accordingly. In the process, much is learned about historical-political realities of both past and present. In the second place, she brings to the fore the key question of critical commitment, that is, the need for the critic to set forth the ideological aims behind their work. Here the decision to move outside dominant frameworks and seek instead the voices of the other proves right on target.

Vaka'uta places at the forefront of minority criticism a sense of solidarity with other ethnic-racial formations and pursuits of the critical task in allied and comparative fashion. What for him signifies involvement with other indigenous peoples and lenses of Oceania is applicable, in principle, to other spatial-geographical areas around the globe or across such areas in transglobal fashion, linking together historical and epistemic frameworks in the process. His exercise further shows the need for expansive research regarding other frameworks and the wisdom of taking imperial-colonial backgrounds, similar or parallel, into consideration. That such criticism does not spare one from a close analysis of the text is made clear, as is the explicit call to be in touch with real life in criticism, if anything for the sake of relevance.

Yee raises a problematic for minority studies, which she leaves open, that I find imperative: the relationship of an ethnic-racial angle of vision to other critical angles of vision. This I take to be the question of focalized alongside multilayered criticism. Her critical approach also brings to the fore a couple of essential components: the value of historical analogies between past and present, and the close study of the historical-political paths behind minority groups in the United States, whether one's own or

those of others. At the same time, her attention to the intricacies of the texts and their contexts proves a healthy reminder.

#### On John 4:4–42

Charles's work conveys two important calls to minority critics. The first is to read as real critics, a stance that entails critical analysis of themselves as minoritized. Such analysis bears a twofold application. First, it examines the personal life of the critic, both in the diaspora and at home, leading to a joint reading of text and self. Second, it scrutinizes the historical-political context behind the personal life, allowing for comparisons between text and self. Such autobiographical reading opens up a whole range of social and cultural dimensions and connections. The second call is to read as engaged critics, a stance that requires opposition to dialectical definitions of identity, including ethnic-racial minoritization, whether in life or in texts. Such reading against the grain allows for imaginative, challenging rewritings of the biblical texts.

With Foskett comes a noteworthy attack on dialectical definitions of ethnic-racial identity. She urges critics to insist on breaking through the gaze imposed on minorities by dominant formations, be it in the world of today or in the world of antiquity. Against the essentializing dynamics and restrictive consequences of such fixation on identity, minority critics should stress instead the web of interconnections—not only rich and complex, but also flexible and shifting—that bind all actors, minority and dominant alike, to their respective social-cultural networks. With such a critical perspective comes the possibility of moving beyond paralyzing stereotypes to form ever new connections, develop ever new networks, and create ever new identities.

For minority critics, Sánchez offers a felicitous designation for their task in terms of marronage. The designation captures a twofold duty: resisting and dislodging existing frameworks behind the dominant production of knowledge, while conceptualizing and formulating alternative frameworks for the minority production of knowledge. Through such interventions the process of academic and professional minoritization—the dialectics of superior and inferior knowledge, domination and submission—can be interrupted and overturned. Toward this end, Sánchez contributes two important strategies: incorporating the various axes of ideological criticism in order to move beyond the traditional religious-theological lens of interpretation, and integrating cross-temporal examples of minoritization

in order to shed light on the dialectics of opposition in texts and examples alike. Indeed, for Sánchez, minority critics are not to spare the biblical texts but to challenge ethnic-racial dialectics of epistemic privilege wherever deployed, including the biblical texts.

What Smith brings to the forefront of minority criticism is the juncture of a real-life situation and a biblical text. Such a move places a two-fold demand on critics: thorough engagement with the issue in question, in the light of its social-cultural context, both local and global; and close attention to the issue in question as represented in the text, against the backdrop of its social-cultural context, local and global alike. Such a move brings dividends as well: the wisdom and authority of the Bible to bear on the world of the present, and the conflicts and positions of today to shed light on the world of the past. To be sure, each issue can be addressed in its own right—in this case, through the modern concept of human rights and the ancient concept of hospitality. However, what the juxtaposition does is to search for joint principles of action—in this case, the availability of water as fundamental to all human beings, regardless of ethnic-racial, gender, or economic divisions.

Williams's work underlines for minority critics the importance of grounding one's task within the context of one's ethnic-racial formation. He also shows effective ways of so doing, both in general and in particular fashion. What the more expansive perspective demands is analysis of the social-cultural situation of the group. What is surfaced is a trenchant way of reading reality and experience: a process involving dehumanization at the hands of the dominant formation as well as rehumanization on the part of the minority group. What the more circumscribed perspective requires is analysis of the religious-theological situation and its relation to this process. What is highlighted is a key site for examining both sides of the process: the practice of preaching. Williams's work offers other important pointers as well: doing close readings of texts in historical context and paying attention to readings from throughout the world. Yet another, and to me crucial, reminder of his work is its driving aim—bringing down boundaries in the pursuit of justice and dignity.

## On Revelation 18

Crowder offers key contributions to minority studies. The first is to avail oneself of a solid and sophisticated grounding in the critical tradition of one's ethnic-racial group. This she does in her analysis of African American

mothers by invoking the insights of womanist thinking and the findings of maternal scholarship. Closely related to this move, the second contribution is to harp on the need for a multidimensional approach that takes into consideration other pertinent axes of human identity, such as gender and class as well as empire. The third contribution is to foreground the aim of one's work as a minority critic, for one undertakes such work not in a vacuum but in a charged systemic context, where one must work toward liberation while always keeping in mind the power of the system and the consequences of critique.

What Mata brings to minority criticism is, first and foremost, a keen exercise in intersectional work, given a sophisticated juxtaposition of ethnic-racial criticism and imperial-postcolonial criticism. In this he is distinctly helped by his knowledge of and appeal to the critical tradition of his ethnic-racial formation, where such a joint analysis has been carried out at the contemporary level by way of borderlands theory. With this exercise, further important points are made, of which I single out but two. One of these is the call to analyze the rhetorical tenor and objectives of the text and to raise the question of implications—who stands to benefit and who does not. From this stance, the text stands subject to ideological analysis. Another is the need for thorough, critical acquaintance with the historical-political trajectory of the group taken as one's foundation, its past experience and present reality. With this stance, the context stands no less subject to ideological analysis.

What Nadella contributes to minority criticism is, above all, an ever-timely reminder to keep the problematic of wealth and poverty foremost in mind at all times and at all levels. This he does in sophisticated fashion by bringing ethnic-racial criticism into dialogue with materialist criticism and postcolonial criticism. Such analysis seeks to expose the economic structures and policies of dominant systems and the ramifications of such frameworks for minority formations. A most valuable contribution in this regard bears close attention. This is the need to analyze how minority groups, including one's own, navigate such contexts, especially if, within such differential relations of power, a group identification with the dominant and distantiation from the other minorities. Here Nadella asserts the value of solidarity in minority criticism.

Pillay offers valuable reminders for minority studies. One such reminder is the benefit of cultural studies: the need to place social-cultural context and popular-critical interpretation side by side in the study of reception of a text, as she does here by tracing the meaning and import



attached to Revelation through various historical-political phases of South Africa. Another is the ideological dimension to be attached to any an exercise: the need to be explicit about aims, as she does here in invoking the cause of feminism and recurring to feminist theory to analyze what happens to women in both the text and the context in the course of such studies. A third reminder is that the text itself must be subjected to such ideological analysis: the need for religious-theological scholars to critique the text, as she shows here by drawing a structural similarity between the patriarchal framework of Revelation and the patriarchal framework of today.

### A Concluding Comment

The above reflections bear further rumination as well—individually; collectively, by way of text examined; collectively, by way of ethnic-racial affiliation; and globally, across all four texts examined. Many valuable connections and contrasts would emerge in the process. What does come across, as it is, is a wealth of information on and resources for the pursuit of ethnic-racial minority criticism. The project thus lays a solid and suggestive foundation for the future.



## Afterword: Dilemma of (In)Visibility? Reading the Bible as Racial/Ethnic Minoritized Scholars

Tat-siong Benny Liew

This collection of essays by racial/ethnic minoritized critics of the Bible highlights the various factors and dynamics at play in the formation of power relations within and through four biblical texts (Gen 21; 1 Kgs 21; John 4; Rev 18). In doing so, it also challenges the power differentials that are structurally embedded in specific social-cultural contexts and in our shared context of the guild of biblical studies. Despite its problematic privileging of vision among all human senses, *invisibility* is a common way to express and protest a structurally disadvantaged position. Ralph Ellison's (1952) book about black experience, *Invisible Man*, has, for example, turned this into a well-known and well-used trope.<sup>1</sup> Being put in the

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I presented different parts and versions of this essay in the College of the Wooster, Williams College, and Denison University and am grateful for the questions and feedback from these audiences. My thanks to Chan Sok Park (College of the Wooster), Denise Buell and Jacqueline Hidalgo (Williams College), and Maia Kotrosits and Christine Pae (Denison University) for inviting me to share my work at their respective institutions.

1. Ann Anlin Cheng (2001), referring to Ellison's book and other writings by minoritized writers, argues that "racial melancholy" is both a register and a result of being rendered invisible. There are plenty of book titles in various fields by minoritized scholars that feature the word *invisibility* or *invisible*. See, e.g., Wallace 1990; Gross 2002; Prats 2002; Jacobsen and Raj 2008; Szmańko 2008; Tehranian 2009; Harris and Kiyama 2015; Kim 2016; Carter 2018; Perez 2019. These same words have, of course, also appeared in book titles about whiteness (e.g., Cabrera, Franklin, and Watson 2017; Craven 2019); this is exactly the dilemma that I address in this afterword. For now, let me simply point out that whiteness is hardly invisible to those who are not white (Yancy 2004), since sight is thankfully not the monopoly of those who have been privileged with whiteness.

margins or being minoritized involves the experience and feeling of not being seen, acknowledged, or recognized. If being rendered invisible is the problem, then desiring to rise to visibility or to gain recognition becomes a reasonable response, redress, and remedy. This understanding has more or less been underlying various subordinated groups' adoption of an identity politics of recognition (Taylor 1992; Bondi 1993), including those that have been minoritized on the basis of race/ethnicity.<sup>2</sup> The attempt is to anchor a group identity and to ask others, especially those who oppress you or put you down, to "Look at me, look at us! We are here!"<sup>3</sup> This was what African American scholars of the Bible did back in the 1980s and 1990s. Inspired and influenced by both the civil rights movement and different kinds of liberation theology, they argued for not only their qualification as professional exegetes of the Bible (and hence their rightful presence within the biblical studies guild), but also the positive presence of black persons and black cultures in the Bible itself (Copher 1993; Felder 1989; 1991; cf. Brown 2004, 24–60). Cain Hope Felder (1993, 192–94) famously argues, for instance, that Mary and Jesus are more like "Yemenite, Trinidadian, or African American today" in appearance. Since then, we read our Bibles and write our interpretations of the Bible as African Americans, Latinx, or Asian Americans. With our published works on the Bible and its interpretation, we become readable, legible, and visible. With that visibility, we also establish an identity for not only our academic work but also ourselves. In other words, racial/ethnic minoritized readings of the Bible function primarily to resist a tyranny of lily-white purity in both academic *and* racial/ethnic terms. Such readings confront and challenge the ideology and hence the politics, practices, and realities of exclusion and

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2. Theoretical discussions of identity and recognition in the last few decades invoke at times Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's (2018, 108–16) mastery-and-servitude dialectic, partly because Hegel's dialectic—namely, the suggestion that self-consciousness or subjectivity is not inherent but dependent on relations with others and formed through mutual recognition—is consistent with poststructuralist/postmodern arguments against liberalism's emphasis on human autonomy; see, e.g., Taylor 1992. This has further led to philosophical explorations on the relations among identity, recognition, and the concept of freedom; see, e.g., Honneth 1996; 2015; Kim 2007.

3. When the prestigious academic journal *New Literary History* decided to feature Ellen Messer-Davidow's theoretical essay on feminist literary criticism and invited Amy Ling (1987, 151, 160) to write "an Asian American Woman's Response" in the 1980s, Ling decided to not only title her response "I'm Here" but also end her response with the words "we're here."

domination in both academy and society.<sup>4</sup> And they often do so by putting forth their respective racial/ethnic heritages to make themselves and their respective racial/ethnic identities visible.

This desire for visibility certainly makes sense. Jonathan Beller's (2006) attention theory of value clearly suggests that, among other things, human attention produces value in this image culture of globalized, neoliberal capitalism, so someone or something cannot be valuable unless it is visible and has at least the potential of attracting attention. Many have, however, come to realize and emphasize that visibility can also be a problem. A well-known and often-cited phrase, "Look, a Negro!" in Frantz Fanon's (1967, 112) famous book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, shows that a black person's struggle has to do with hypervisibility as much as invisibility. The child cries out, "Mama, see the Negro! I am frightened," in Fanon's book precisely because Fanon's blackness is visible. In fact, it is so readily visible that a child cannot fail to see it, recognize it, and understand it as (solely!) a kind of threat. No wonder Fanon (116) writes,

I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected under white eyes.... I slip into corners, and my long antenna pick up the catch-phrases strewn over the surface of things—nigger underwear smells of nigger—nigger teeth are white—nigger feet are big—the nigger's barrel chest—I slip into corners, I remain silent, I strive for anonymity, for invisibility.

After all, the process of racialization is much dependent on seeing and recognizing phenotypical peculiarities such as skin color, hair type, or facial features. That is to say, dismissal or invisibility because of one's race/ethnicity is actually predicated on a prior visibility or legibility. Being visible or legible, however, one can also be turned into a spectacle or be placed under surveillance, and surveillance only means that one is merely "watched" without being "seen" (Ryland 2013).<sup>5</sup> The difference between

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4. Racisms today "rely not necessarily on biological conceptions of race but on institutional and biopolitical mechanisms, which differentiate populations into sub-groups having varied access to means of life and death" (Chari and Verdery 2009, 12). Examples of such mechanisms may include university admissions and employment hiring criteria and protocols, private and public health programs, incarceration practices, or immigration policies.

5. Regarding today's increasing pervasive practice of surveillance in general, see, e.g., Staples 2014. For an example that looks at surveillance as a motif in Asian

being watched and being seen is obvious in the case of African American women; their bodies, often hypersexualized, may be ubiquitous on the internet and other places, but their personal dignity and their sociopolitical interests are not necessarily honored or acknowledged (Ryland 2013; Noble 2013).<sup>6</sup>

Some may remember the iconic photograph of a young and nameless Afghan girl taken by Steve McCurry in 1984 when Afghanistan was under Soviet occupation. Since its appearance on the cover of *National Geographic* in 1985, it has become one of the most memorable, widely reproduced, circulated, and celebrated photographs of the last century. Some have even called the photograph “the First World’s Third World *Mona Lisa*” (Hesford and Kozol 2005, 1). She—fully clothed, head covered, looking solemn, with her large green eyes staring right at the camera—has through this photograph been made into something like a definitive symbol of Afghans and refugees worldwide who are in need of Western pity and rescue, yet she is really no more than an image on which the Western world has projected its message of international human rights. This is similar to what Michel Foucault (1980, 152), in “The Eye of Power,” calls a “visibility which exists to serve a rigorous, meticulous power.”

After 9/11, McCurry (2013, 70–91), the photographer, launched an all-out search for “the Afghan girl” almost two decades later. The search was not out of his concern for her personal well-being; it was motivated by the need to galvanize once again support for beliefs in the liberalism of and liberations by the geopolitical West. Determined to have a good look of her face, McCurry inappropriately asked her, now a married Muslim woman, to drop her veil when he found her. McCurry also used an iris eye scanner to verify whether she was really *his* “Afghan girl” before taking another photograph of her to “gift” the world a then-and-now contrast. He was sure that he could see *through* this person and assure her identity with not only his camera but also his iris eye scanner. Susan Sontag (1977, 14–15) provocatively writes:

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American literature, see Chiu 2014. For an example of how pervasive technological intrusions of our digital age have made not only surveillance possible but also invisibility desirable for people at times, see Busch 2019.

6. Stephanie Nohelani Teves (2015, 257) makes a similar argument about Hawai‘ian women and their hula dancing. See also Shimizu 2007 about the projection of Asian American women on screen.

To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as a camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a subliminal murder—a soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time.

The power differential between McCurry and this Afghan woman reminds me of the famous statement by Jacques Lacan (1981, 71): “I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides.” Even after this search and revelation of her name, most people still only know her as the “Afghan girl.” If there is a name being associated with her picture, it is that of her photographer, Steve McCurry, not her own name: Sharbat Gula. Gula is hypervisible but only as an image; Gula as an individual person actually remains invisible.<sup>7</sup>

Edward Said observes a different phenomenon, but it tells the same story. Said (1978, 287) writes in his well-known book, *Orientalism*: “In newsreels or newsphotos, the Arab is always shown in large numbers. No individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences. Most of the pictures represent mass rage and misery, or irrational (hence hopelessly eccentric) gestures.” Whether in groups or alone, it is the same: any Arab is made visible as a type cast, a personality or people type that is known and unchanging. Roland Barthes (1972, 96) in his book, *Mythologies*, adds, “The same applies to refugees, a long procession of which is shown at the beginning, coming down a mountain: to identify them is of course unnecessary; they are eternal essences of refugees, which it is in the nature of the East to produce.” What is on display is their eternal essences, the changeless core of their beings.

No wonder Megan Ryland (2013) writes, “If hypervisibility threatens overexposure and harsh scrutiny while invisibility enforces silence and erasure, marginalized groups are left in a precarious position. Visibility therefore becomes a double-edged sword that seems dangerous to wield at times. Is it worth trying to be seen if it really just opens me up to be judged?”

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7. I am indebted to Matthew Gamber for helping me think about the encounters between Gula and McCurry through Sontag’s work. For a helpful discussion of the complicated dynamics regarding the media focus on Afghan and Muslim women, see Abu-Lughod 2013, esp. 27–53.

## On the Horns of a Dilemma

A person or a group who has been marginalized or minoritized on the basis of race/ethnicity may well ricochet “between hypervisibility and oblivion” (Williams 1998, 17), as Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber (2008) show in their edited volume, *Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*. They may also experience both simultaneously, because invisibility and hypervisibility are not really opposites but only two sides of the same coin. “Visible invisibilities” may indeed be a rather apt shorthand to talk about racism in our times (Kamalani 2019). For instance, those of the dominant culture in the United States are often more than ready—but also only ready—to see and recognize African Americans as violent criminals or physically gifted but intellectually stunted athletes and entertainers, Latinx Americans as illegal immigrants or dispensable laborers, and Asian Americans as model minorities or perpetual foreigners. “We” are seen but not really seen.

Perhaps the most thorough critique of visibility as a politics of racial/ethnic identity and recognition comes from Rey Chow (2002).<sup>8</sup> According to Chow, Chinese and Japanese intellectuals from the 1900 to the 1930s had already questioned whether the visibility given to Chinese and Japanese figures and faces on film actually celebrates them, as opposed to identifying them as racially and culturally inferior. Just as one may not see the cinematic camera that determines what and how specific images are seen (see Mulvey 1975), the production—in fact, the proliferation—of images may, according to Chow, function to hide or obscure something else.<sup>9</sup> Patriarchy can, therefore, be hidden but actually hardened through

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8. A similar critique of visibility from the perspective of feminism can also be found in Phelan 1993. To make her point, Phelan writes, “If representational visibility equals power, then almost naked young white women should be running Western culture. The ubiquity of their image, however, has hardly brought them political or economic power” (10).

9. Chow herself does not discuss this, but when the United States was doing all kinds of nuclear testing in the Pacific islands in the mid-twentieth century, what one often saw in the media was instead Pacific women scantily clad in two-piece bikinis. Seeing lots of skin—especially highly sexualized female skins—in this case only worked to cover up and keep out of sight other exploits that were being done on the bodies of Pacific islanders and on the Pacific Islands (Teaiwa 2010; Williams 2017). As Teresa K. Teaiwa (2010, 15) writes, “By drawing attention to a sexualized and supposedly depoliticized female body ... the sexist dynamic the bikini performs—objectification



productions and projections of female images on film. Casting women in prominent roles and showing their interaction on screen can actually normalize gender identities in problematic ways, including how women should relate, or more accurately, subordinate and cater to men. Problematizing subordinated groups' identity politics and their pursuit for visibility and recognition in what she calls the "difference revolution" (Chow 2002, 128), Chow proposes the need to examine the visibility of visibility or the structuration of knowability; that is to say, one must attend to the structural conditions or contexts in which someone or something becomes visible, legible, and knowable.

Chow (2002, 95, 107) calls the current condition in which racial/ethnic minoritized persons find themselves one of "coercive mimeticism": namely, when the object of one's imitation is "no longer the white man or his culture but rather an image, a stereotyped view" of the colonized self. In other words, racial/ethnic minoritized people are compelled to talk consistently and incessantly about their own identities and lives; in doing so, they end up objectifying themselves to authenticate the familiar image that the dominant culture has of them as different. "We" make "ourselves" into something like research objects or study specimens, and "we" write as if "we" are confessing "our" otherness to "our" white masters or serving as their native informants, so they will know everything about "us." Chow makes a connection here between visibility and ethnography, which, of course,

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through excessive visibility—inverts the colonial dynamics that have obscured during nuclear testing in the Pacific, that is, objectification by rendering invisible." For a helpful discussion of how power operates to determine what and when one may see and may not see in the context of Israel and Palestine, see Hochberg 2015. For a critique of how surveillance studies in the United States ironically fails to see the settler state, see Smith 2015.

Similarly, Judy Tzu-Chun Wu shows that Vietnamese women who participated in the war were also given high visibility by those in the United States who were against the war, against imperialism, and against oppression of women. This visibility was, however, a form of "radical orientalism"; by reversing the dominant hierarchy and idealizing the East as the source of inspiration and impugning the West as the soul of imperialism, this visibility simultaneously reinforced the dominant dichotomy that essentializes an East-versus-West duality (Wu 2013, 4–11).

In the same article, Wu also points to the hypervisibility of Asian women in the racial and gender education of US military and details how Asian women were often depicted and seen as "symbolic sexual objects" with vaginas that "were slanted, like their eyes" within the US military (cited in Wu 2013, 257; cf. Shimizu 2007).

had its origin in the field of anthropology. The power differential that exists when a minoritized group is the object of ethnography being studied and written about by visiting white anthropologists is, for Chow, also present when a minoritized group is the subject of autoethnography writing their own narratives. “We” remain the ones who are being looked at, the ones who need to offer up transparent access to “our” true selves and to all the truths about “us” in relentless referentiality.<sup>10</sup> Chow sees this as particularly problematic, since the desire to be seen and to become transparent now has been internalized and volunteered by the racial/ethnic minoritized community. “We” willingly turn “ourselves” into spectacles, exhibits, or displays for the wider white public. “We” voluntarily become like caged animals in a zoo to entertain or satisfy (white) people’s curiosity. “We” become visible and are recognized, but the unequal power relations remain unchanged and perhaps even more entrenched. “Our” need and urge to establish an identity and gain visibility may actually back “ourselves” into a corner in what Andrea Smith (2010, 43; cf. Chow 2012, 169–82) calls “ethnographic entrapment.” As Mary Ann Tolbert (1995, 273) puts it, “Be careful how you define your place, for you will very likely be told to stay in it.” To raise the ante further, Antonio Viego (2007, 100) suggests that an “ethnic-racialized subject” who is “thoroughly calculable and exhaustible” is a “dead subject.”

Attempts to authorize an identity and attain visibility by representing or re-presenting “ourselves” involves, therefore, complicated dynamics (see Melamed 2001). As Albert Memmi (1965, 79) wrote over half a century ago, “The existence of the colonizer requires that an image of the colonized be suggested,” and as Foucault (1977, 200) stated matter-of-factly a decade or so later, “Visibility is a trap.” What we make visible as a racial/ethnic minoritized group may be taken and assumed by others as some kind of transparent, essential, inherent, and never-changing characteristics; they may also be used within one’s own racial/ethnic minoritized group as a kind of litmus test to see whether someone really belongs. How may we negotiate or address this dilemma of (in)visibility for racial/ethnic minoritized persons through our racial/ethnic specific readings of the Bible?<sup>11</sup>

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10. Chow’s argument here reminds me of how Frank Chin, in his critique of Maxine Hong Kingston’s writings, opposes autobiography as a confessional and Christian form of writing; see Chin 1991 (esp. 8–15). For a helpful discussion of the dilemma faced by minoritized writers, see also Nguyen 2016, 193–222.

11. I addressed this dilemma in an earlier work (Liew 2008a, 18–33). I continue to think about it with (hopefully) new insights, given not only the ridicule of identity

## Seen but Not Seen Through

Chow's warnings regarding self-representation, identity, and visibility are, of course, extremely helpful. Yes, "oppressors can sometimes be equally invisible as the oppressed" (Szymański 2008, 139). However, the link between power and "remaining unmarked" (Phelan 1993, 6) is more contingent than consistent (Cheng 2002, 245–47), and invisibility does not necessarily help those who are less than powerful even if it may work for those who already have power. Moreover, Chow's focus on coercion in her "coercive mimeticism" may have missed or dismissed our agency as racialized or minoritized others (Chiu 2004). Like Chow, Gayatri Spivak (1996, 204–5; cf. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2013, 96–97; Ray 2009, 109–14) knows the danger of essentialism, but Spivak also suggests that essentialism can be strategically useful in specific situations to galvanize support to achieve certain political goals. Spivak, therefore, stresses what Chow does not: the agency of the colonized to make strategic and even subversive choices.

Chow (2002, 106), in her work on coercive mimeticism, also questions the "genuine import" of Homi Bhabha's poststructuralist extension of Fanon's work on the colonized psyche. For Bhabha (1994, 85–92), the colonized is torn between being attracted by and being appalled by the colonial master, and their mimicry of the colonizer is always ambivalent, halfhearted, and incomplete. Given Spivak's emphasis on the agency of the colonized, what if we combine Bhabha's mimicry with Chow's coercive mimeticism to come up with something that is different from both? That is to say, what if what Chow (2002, 112) also calls "*self-mimicry*" on the part of the colonized is also split, tepid, irresolute, and inadequate? What if this divided or failed self-mimicry is a strategic performance of colonized, racialized, or minoritized subjects to re-present and represent themselves to mock not only the colonial master's desire for transparent access to "our" truths but also the colonial master's assumption regarding the correctness or certitude of his truths about "us"?

While Luce Irigaray is more concerned with sexual rather than racial/ethnic difference, she seems to be pointing to this practice of mockery with what she calls mimesis. Irigaray (1993, 151–84), as shown by her

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politics (Fukuyama 2018) but also the rise of white identity politics (Jardina 2019). I do not think what I am suggesting this time necessarily invalidates what I proposed a decade ago.

essay "The Invisible of the Flesh," is wary of any overemphasis on visibility; she nevertheless uses the language of invisibility and visibility to talk about mimesis as a strategy to expose the shaky foundation of (white) phallogocentrism that marginalizes women. Irigaray (1985, 76) writes, "To play with mimesis is ... to make 'visible' by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible." Informed by psychoanalytical theory, Irigaray's mimesis is comparable to how an analyst's role as a sounding board or a mirror to her analysand's words and thoughts (the visible) functions to disclose the analysand's unconscious desires (the invisible; Kozel 1996, 117).<sup>12</sup> Can we, therefore, think and talk about a "strategic mimetism" or self-mimicry that not only resists but also reveals the structures that minoritize people on the basis of race/ethnicity? "We" must not forget that the (in)visibility of racialized and minoritized subjects is tied to the (in)visibility of oppressive systems.

Let me try to make it more concrete with a specific example. In one of the earliest articles on Asian American biblical interpretation, "Uriah the Hittite: A (Con)Text of Struggle for Identity," Uriah Kim (2002) reads Uriah the Hittite in 2 Sam 11 and presents identity in ways that are fluid and hybrid. By writing about Uriah the Hittite but also taking on the name Uriah himself, Kim, a Korean American, identifies with a biblical character who is murdered by King David to cover up his adulterous lust after Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. We find, then, in Kim's article two Uriahs who share (1) the same name and (2) similar but ultimately different experiences of marginalization in different geographies and times. In addition, Kim brings in Vincent Chin toward the end of his article as another Uriah-like character. Chin was a scapegoat victim like Uriah the Hittite, but he was not of Korean ancestry like Kim. Chin was born in China but adopted when he was six by a Chinese father, who had himself immigrated to the United States at seventeen, and earned the right to bring a bride from China into the United States because, like Uriah the Hittite in the Hebrew Bible, he had served in the military of his adopted nation during the Second World War. In 1982, Chin, on the night of his bachelor party before his wedding, was beaten to death near Detroit with a baseball bat by two white auto workers, who mistook Chin as a Japanese, to vent

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12. An example of Irigaray's mimesis is what she calls "hysteria miming," which women can use to release rather than repress their sexuality and instincts by mimicking the hysteria that has long been used by men to stereotype women. See Grosz 1989, 132–39.

their anger over Japan's increasing influence in—or, in their view, invasion into—the US auto market in the 1980s. In contrast to King David, who did suffer divine punishments for what he did to Uriah the Hittite according to 2 Samuel, these two white murderers were convicted of manslaughter without serving any jail time.

Besides these similarities between Uriah the Hittite and Vincent Chin, let me highlight one particular similarity that they also share with Uriah Kim, namely, their layered, less than straightforward, and somewhat slippery identity. Chin was an adopted Chinese American but mistaken and murdered as a Japanese (American?) in his adopted nation; Kim (2002, 71–72) talks about himself as simultaneously a Korean, an American, a Korean American, and an Asian American, as well as his identity as a matter of both being and becoming; and Kim's namesake from the Bible is a Hittite, so a non-Hebrew general of the Hebrew army—in fact, he is one of David's special warriors who have played an instrumental role in securing David's kingship (2 Sam 23:8–39; 1 Chr 11:10–47). As if each of their identities is not unstable enough, Kim makes the comment at the end of his article that the biblical Uriah, Vincent Chin, Kim himself, and all Asian Americans are, all in all, basically interchangeable. His comment here is clearly a mockery of white America's absurd inability or perverse unwillingness to tell the differences between one Asian and another, and Kim is doing so to rework existing materials or sentiments without "elid[ing] the 'harmful' or contradictory components of any identity" to "tap into the energies that are produced by contradictions and ambivalences" (Muñoz 1999, 12, 71). Kim's article, I suggest, is a strategic performance of identity that illustrates Irigaray's mimesis. By reconfiguring these figures from the past into a picture and a part of himself, Kim not only exposes or makes visible the system of oppression that treats its racial/ethnic minoritized others as disposable objects and interchangeable sacrifices but also gives his readers several different images and identities for and of himself. Readers undoubtedly encounter here a representation and a re-presentation of an-other (Kim), but readers also encounter representations and re-presentations of another other (Uriah the Hittite) and another other (Chin) and other others (various Asian Americans). Ultimately, especially with Kim's closing comment on interchangeability, we are not clear who this other is. The longer you read and the harder you look, the more it multiplies and slips away. Kim's title for his article is therefore absolutely apt: "A (Con)Text of Struggle for Identity," especially if we read it as not only Kim's struggle but also his readers' struggle.

In Kim's appropriation of Uriah the Hittite, we see a postcolonial mimicry or mimesis not of a white man but of someone who is othered because of his racial/ethnic difference. This someone, given Kim's identification with and incorporation of Uriah the Hittite, is in a sense also Kim himself, but this self-mimicry ends up diffusing and destabilizing any colonial desire for authenticity and transparency. As Lacan (1981, 99) writes,

Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an *itself* that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage, in the strictly technical sense. It is not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of becoming mottled—exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare.

Camouflage is not about being invisible; it is about disguise or masking one's identity and movement—it is “protective coloring” (Whitford 1991, 72). Strategic mimesis or self-mimicry has the potential to negotiate the theoretical dilemma that Chow identifies: namely, the tensions between being invisible and being hypervisible, between becoming invisible and becoming transparent.

I am basically proposing that racial/ethnic minoritized scholars of the Bible can strategically use “our” readings and writings to assert “our” identities and presence, but who “we” are should not—in fact, cannot—be uncomplicated, clear, or stable. As Jennifer Ann Ho (2015, 4) states, “Ambiguity, specifically racial ambiguity, is the only truly productive lens through which to view race because race itself is so slippery.” After all, much of what racial/ethnic minoritized biblical interpretation has to say about racial/ethnic minoritized identities, experiences, and communities is done indirectly through readings of biblical passages, characters, and events. Although biblical scholars generally do not write in pseudonyms like some biblical writers did, racial/ethnic minoritized scholars of the Bible writing about themselves and their communities through their reading of biblical texts and biblical characters is arguably akin to fashioning pseudo-selves, as we saw in Kim's example. Whatever readers may find about me and about Asian America in my Asian American reading of the Bible is always already filtered, reflected, or refracted through what I write about certain biblical characters or pericopes. There is always already a gap, a distance, or a disparity between what I say about myself and other Asian Americans through the Bible and the many lives that different Asian Americans live. Colonial desire for clear visibility,

direct access, legible transparency, and absolute control is frustrated and arrested by these palimpsest-like layers or layering.

Bhabha's mimicry and Irigaray's mimesis function to expose, respectively, colonial insecurity and phallogocentric (il)logic or bias. By inserting various concerns of "our" communities and times into "our" readings of the Bible, racial/ethnic minoritized biblical interpretation is often criticized for being anachronistic. Anachronism—as in being out of proper temporal period or sequence—is a stereotypical criticism against people of color. As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2008, 7) puts it, "The 'first in Europe then elsewhere' structure of global historical time was historicist." In other words, historicism not only assumes a linear progression of history but also reduces historical difference as nothing but reproductions of Europe's past. The so-called anachronistic practice of racial/ethnic minoritized biblical criticism can be understood in this light as an audacious claim of "coevalness" (Fabian 1983). This claim or refusal to wait exposes and interrupts historicism's idealization and certitude of history as a transitional and progressive narrative with an established past and an assured future. Instead, coevalness—as Kim does by juxtaposing himself, Uriah the Hitite, Vincent Chin, and numerous other unnamed Asian Americans—scrambles, releases, and brings history from the past into the history of the present by confronting present readers with confounding questions that are also demands for a recognition of both identity and complexity. What I am getting at is that we can understand our practice in terms of Bhabha's mimicry and Irigaray's mimesis when we play our stereotypical role as anachronistic critics.<sup>13</sup>

### Difference without Determinism

Irigaray, in her practice of mimesis to expose the essentialism of sexual difference in (white) male philosophy, has herself been criticized for assuming an essentialist understanding of women (see Xu 1995). Similarly, our attempts to protest and contest oppression and marginalization as racial/

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13. To be clear, Irigaray's mimesis or Bhabha's mimicry is but one among many possible and potential strategies for minoritized critics. African American scholars have, for instance, wisely suggested that jazz-informed improvisation is always necessary not only because of the need to respond to unanticipated movements but also because "our identities are complex, elusive, jagged, multiple, and fragmented" (Muyumba 2009, 16).



ethnic minoritized biblical scholars may also end up reifying or reinforcing the construct of race/ethnicity as if it were something biologically determined, inherent, and unchangeable.<sup>14</sup> This danger of reifying race is especially important since identity politics for visibility and recognition by racial/ethnic minoritized folks has now been co-opted as a means to reinforce white power, and what some thought to be a postracial future has turned out to be a deeply racialized present (Kamalani 2019). Late twentieth-century complaints against the so-called majority population not realizing that white is also a color have now given way to white supremacists and white (Christian) nationalists publicly parading a white identity based on “blood and soil” (Jardina 2019).

If race is socially constructed and not biologically determined, can we somehow manipulate and meddle with these racial or racialized categories without denying at all their importance?<sup>15</sup> How can racial/ethnic minoritized writings become, to borrow what Valerie Rohy (2010, 354) says about

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14. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2013, 219–20), *race* was first used in the English language in a poem by William Dunbar in 1508, but first used as biological or phenotypical categorizations by Immanuel Kant in 1764. For many, the appearance of the word *race* in the English language in the modern period shows clearly that the concept was either constructed or reconstructed during that time. Given the close connections among the concept of race, the ranking of racial hierarchy, and the rise of colonialism in modernity (Foucault 1970; Appadurai 1993; Stoler 1995; 2002, 140–61), race may even be read as defining modernity and not simply being an aspect of modernity (Goldberg 1993; da Silva 2007). The time frame of its crystallization if not its construction in modernity, along with numerous nebulous and dubious developments—including the scientific/ideological shifts since modernity’s onset (such as the so-called science of race, the arbitrary choice of different phenotypical markers that caused contradictory racial groupings, so Irish and Jews were considered black at one point)—have led many to question whether the concept of race is even legitimate (Mohanram 1999, 144). Michael Banton (1998, 3, 12), for example, argues that race is often constructed by and out of anxiety, and involves a lot of folk concepts. It is customary, therefore, among many academics to express their conceptual hesitation or reservation by putting the word *race* in either italics or quotation marks (Goldberg 1993, ix). With the election of Barack Obama as the forty-fourth president of the United States, the term *postracial* has even become popular for a while in certain pockets of both society and academy (Tesler 2016).

15. As the construct of race is being questioned and deconstructed, most racialized and minoritized scholars are adamant about its real effects and affects on their daily lives. Just ask those African Americans who, because of their skin color, continue to wait and wave on the sidewalk of many major cities in the United States as empty cab after empty cab flies by them without stopping. Or ask Asian Americans



queer archives, “a technology of identity” through which our identities can be built, shifted, pluralized, and questioned all at the same time?

In 1975, British writer David Lodge published the first of his “campus trilogy” titled *Changing Places*. The novel is a satiric comedy featuring two university professors, one British and one American, who participate in a six-month academic exchange program in 1969, when all kinds of protest movement, whether based on race/ethnicity or gender, were taking place on and off university campuses. While the exchange is short term, the results turn out to be long lasting. Both of them not only end up having an affair with the other’s wife, but they also come to like and appreciate the culture and the way of life across the Atlantic that they first did not understand or even despised. With a change of landscape and environment, these two professors do not simply exchange jobs and potentially spouses; they exchange personalities. From a dull, diffident, and devoted family man, the British professor turns into a lustful swinger upon landing on the earthquake- and landslide-prone soils of California, while the arrogant, assertive, womanizing, and globe-trotting American professor wants to settle down at an obscure and stodgy red-brick university in England and start a new domestic life with his new lover. Detours can change people and their understandings.

While race/ethnicity is only a background factor in Lodge’s novel, I suggest that racial/ethnic minoritized scholars of the Bible can also change places and assume different roles provided that “we” are willing to read and be touched by books and resources from other racial/ethnic minoritized communities to know what “we” need to (un)learn. This (un)learning is especially important, since an identity politics of recognition should really be about “being a party to the perception making that shapes our world, being as seeing in addition to being as being seen” (Oliver 2001, 150). If it is just about “us” being seen, then “we” can easily forget about or even participate in the exclusion or erasure of other others. “We” cannot check “our” own blind spots if “we” refuse to turn “our” heads. To improve “our” reading, “we” need to have not only a clear sight but also a broad outlook. Get a different assemblage of books in my personal library and read them—in the words of Patricia Williams (1998, 69, 20), as an “investment in another, indeed the investment of oneself

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who, because of their face and race, inevitably draw the seemingly innocent question, “Where are you from?” In the words of Cornel West (1993), “Race [still] matters.”

as that other” and not what she calls a “pornographic seeing”—and they can help me engender different views and different visions of people, of the world, and of the Bible. I can learn to read the Bible “as a Latinx” or “as an African American”—with proper acknowledgments of their non-monolithic and complicated variations, since Latinx America and African America (in ways similar to Asian America) involve a multiplicity or plurality of nations, nationalities, geographical locations, and cultural traditions (see Spivak 2008, 209–38). As many racial/ethnic minoritized scholars of the Bible have pointed out, before “we” embraced the practice of minoritized readings, “we” were not only taught but also managed to read the Bible as if “we” were white by using the methods and resources of white Europeans and by asking the same questions asked by white European scholars. If I can learn to read as if I were a white person, I can also learn to read as a member of a different racial/ethnic minoritized community. There is no need for me to claim to be, say, a Latinx or even an expert on Latinx biblical interpretation—and I certainly could not be performing Latinx readings for my own fame and fortune at the expense of my Latinx colleagues<sup>16</sup>—but if I can perform a Latinx reading of the Bible *once in a while after learning humbly from and responsibly about* Latinx experiences and resources, I can show that there is not one right (and certainly not one white) way to read the Bible; that racial/ethnic minoritized readings are valid; and that identity-based practices, polemics, and rhetoric are strategic rather than innate.<sup>17</sup> Just as cross-dressing may show that gender is learned and not inborn (Butler 1990, 37, 138–39), performing this kind of occasional racial/ethnic drag “denaturalizes the process of racialization and makes transparent the power structures that underlie racial classification” (Ho 2015, 5). Reading as drag may also constructively confuse and confound those who want to (1) claim a color-blind objectivity and (2) use race/ethnicity to limit and define other people’s place and practices.

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16. As Amiri Baraka has famously put it, “All cultures learn from each other. The problem is that if the Beatles tell me that they learned everything they know from Blind Willie, I want to know why Blind Willie is still running an elevator in Jackson, Mississippi” (cited in Hong 2020, 102).

17. While I have not yet tried to perform a Latinx reading of the Bible, I did use primarily African American resources to perform one particular reading of John’s Gospel for precisely the purpose of showing race/ethnicity as a construct; see Liew 2008b.

Reversibility is the name that Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1968) gives to the seeing-seen and touching-touched relation that he explores in works such as *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and the Invisible*.<sup>18</sup> Questioning certain binary divisions that have long dominated philosophical and interpretive thoughts (such as subject from object, or vision from other senses), Merleau-Ponty emphasizes an almost simultaneous and often inevitable reality that the one who sees is also being seen, and the one who touches is also being touched. As a white man, Merleau-Ponty could perhaps expect and might have experienced this kind of reciprocity, which is not necessarily extended by those in the dominant culture to racial/ethnic minoritized peoples. This is precisely the problem of being invisible. However, I do wonder whether occasional reversal or exchange of “our” racial/ethnic specific reading practices among minoritized scholars of the Bible would not help members of different racial/ethnic minoritized communities to see not only one another’s oppression but also one another’s resistance, so minoritized subjects can work together across racial/ethnic boundaries for change. In her well-known exposition of what she calls “oppositional gaze,” bell hooks (2003, 95, 103) explains that to politicize “‘looking’ relations,” one “learns to look a certain way in order to resist,” but this includes “creat[ing] alternative texts that are not solely reactions” and “participat[ing] in a broad range of looking relations.” Rather than assuming whites or Europe as an automatic or universal point of reference (Chow 2006, 77–78), different scholars have suggested the need to multiply or change “our” point of reference as methodologically decisive (e.g., Chen 2010; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Kim 2017). In other words, there can really be a different kind of identity politics of recognition: namely, one that does not seek recognition from those of

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18. Merleau-Ponty’s (1968, 136, 214) reversibility actually includes for him further the reversibility between what is visible and what is tangible, and hence implies the untenable divide between what he calls “sensible sentient body” and “the sensible world.” That is to say, Merleau-Ponty’s work challenges the tendency to emphasize vision and emphasizes instead the interconnectedness of various senses. Despite criticisms—particularly by Irigaray (e.g., 1993, 151–84) that his reversibility is actually an appropriation of irreducible otherness, including sight’s appropriation of touch and other senses—Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on reversibility and hence the porosity of boundaries and the interactions, even interdependence and intertwining, of various actants has been influential to and important for the development of new materialism (e.g., Bennett 2010; Coole and Frost 2010; Rivera Rivera 2015) and environmental ethics (e.g., Abram 1996; Bannon 2014).

the dominant culture but recognition among different minoritized groups through active learning of and from another other(ed). “We” should not forget that identity politics of recognition can also be performed to help some persons of color to recognize themselves as members of a racial/ethnic minoritized community. Invisibility of racial/ethnic minoritized persons or communities to those of the dominant culture does not have to be the only or the primary reason for the practice of identity politics. Hooks (1990, 22) writes:

Fundamental to the process of decentering the oppressive other and claiming our right to subjectivity is the insistence that we must determine how we will be and not rely on colonizing responses to determine our legitimacy. We are not looking to that Other for recognition. We are recognizing ourselves and willingly making contact with all who would engage us in a constructive manner.

In sum, we can “learn to develop habits of recognition and to see strangers as kin, oftentimes by creating sites of community identity where the sight of others, as our own, is affirmed” (Nguyen 2016, 60). Despite Nancy Fraser’s (1997, 11–39; cf. Fraser and Honneth 2003) static and binary categorization of an affirmative identity politics versus a transformative deconstructive politics, there can be—there is—a transformational identity politics of collective agency that enables coalitions and alliances between and among different racial/ethnic minoritized communities (Keating 1998; cf. Szymański 2008, 11–13) if and when “we” are willing to work for and on it.

### Relations after Critical Ethnic Studies

Vijay Prashad (2007) has wondered aloud how history and knowledge may be reconfigured if people from Africa, Asia, and Latin America can converse without Western presence and interference. Pointing to historical instances of what he calls “Afro-Asian connections,” Prashad (2001; cf. Ho and Mullen 2008) has also argued for not only a new minoritized coalition but also a subversive fusion of subordinated racial/ethnic groups. Prashad’s (2001, ix–xi, 51, 65) ultimate aim is thus not a color-blind society, but a creation of “new skins” to challenge “epidermic determinism” and to confuse dominant racial/ethnic logics.

Prashad calls for a renewal of coalition among racial/ethnic minoritized peoples, because yet another challenge for racial/ethnic minoritized

readers of the Bible in particular and for studies of race/ethnicity in general is the problem of multicultural liberalism. Without addressing structural and material inequalities, multicultural liberalism “celebrates” different racial/ethnic groups as if they are different food groups, with each group having its own particular makeup, characteristics, and nutrients. Racial/ethnic minoritized readings of the Bible in this scenario really have nothing to offer to anyone except to members of one’s own specific group or community. This is yet another reason why minoritized biblical criticism is not necessarily read even if it is known.

Dissatisfied with not only the food-group model but also the institutionalization and domestication of ethnic studies, the Critical Ethnic Studies Association was formed in the larger world of literary/cultural studies around 2010–2011 with several specific articulated directions that will also be helpful for racial/ethnic minoritized scholars of the Bible to consider (see Critical Ethnic Studies Association n.d.).

First, the association seeks to move beyond ethnic studies’ previous emphasis on “claiming America” to establish a sense of national belonging for a particular minoritized community. Instead, it seeks to connect and compare oppression of and resistance by people of color across national boundaries and among disparate populations. Second, it intends to cultivate a crossing with native or indigenous studies, so scholars will not only interrogate imperialism abroad and internal colonialism at home but also scrutinize settler colonialism. Third, in addition to insisting on the rights of the minoritized, it pushes for the analysis of white supremacy’s logic, and how that logic enables race and racism. Fourth, it advocates integrating critical inquiries about race/ethnicity with those of gender, sexuality, class, and so on to attend to intersectional oppression and dynamics, because identity, even if it looks singular or dominant, is always already a conglomeration.

All of these four points are applicable to the practice of racial/ethnic minoritized readings of the Bible. In terms of analyzing whiteness, for instance, racial/ethnic minoritized scholars can have a more active engagement with scholarship that has made the link among anti-Judaism, anti-Semitism, and the question of whiteness in recent years, although “we” need to be careful to not end up recentering whiteness in doing so (see Du Bois 1996).<sup>19</sup> Let me, however, elaborate further on the point

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19. I think here particularly of the work of Heschel 1998; 2008; Hess 2002; Anidjar 2003; 2008. I am greatly indebted to Phillip Webster and Shelly Matthews for helping me to see the need to learn about and engage this trail of scholarship. I also need to

regarding the need for racial/ethnic minoritized peoples to engage with the reality of settler colonialism and the issue of indigeneity. While the lack of indigenous and native scholars in biblical studies is well known, “we” have to recognize that “uncover[ing] and analyz[ing] the logics of settler colonialism ... affect all areas of life” (Smith 2010, 63). After all, settler colonialism studies and indigenous studies are becoming increasingly vibrant, and scholars in ethnic studies have begun to realize in the last few years the need to further broaden the scope of their analyses by engaging these studies (see Day 2016; Blackwell and Urrieta 2017; Karuka 2019; King 2019). These engagements have both resulted from and led to the sobering recognition that desires of minoritized populations to “claim America” have failed to acknowledge the United States as a settler-colonial state, and how “the postcolonial operates simultaneously as the colonial” (Young 2016, 20; cf. Fujikane and Okamura 2008; Azuma 2019; Lu 2019).<sup>20</sup> To bring things closer to the field of biblical studies, the problem of ignoring settler colonialism and indigenous studies can be seen perhaps most vividly by the fact that a prominent mainline seminary in the United States could, shortly after its founding out of a commitment to abolish slavery, receive a book with a cover made with the skin of a murdered Native American as a gift, which the seminary proudly displayed in a glass case for almost a century without any sense of wrong, shame, or irony (Tinker 2014). While minoritized persons did not found this seminary, “we” also need to watch out for “our” own blind spots. Racial/ethnic specific interpretations of the Bible should have widespread impacts beyond any singular minoritized community; unfortunately, the impacts of “our” work have not always been positive because “we” are too focused on being seen to see other marginalized people—and “our” wrongdoings against them. Minoritized identities should never be idealized as if they can keep a person or a group from acting unjustly or reading unethically (Chow 1998).

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thank Jacqueline Hidalgo for reminding me of the danger of recentring whiteness in analyzing whiteness. At the same time, there is no denying in my mind that some people of color—especially some within Asian American communities—“have yet to truly reckon with where [they] stand in the capitalist white supremacist hierarchy” of the United States (Hong 2020, 86).

20. Note that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples differentiates indigenous peoples from minority population because only indigenous peoples have the right to form their own nation. See Fujikane 2008, 4–5.

The foci on transnationality, indigeneity, white supremacy, and intersectionality being suggested by the Critical Ethnic Studies Association signal to me an emphasis on permeability or perhaps even on interdependence, which in many ways is also what Merleau-Ponty's reversibility means to underscore in his own privileged and hence overoptimistic or even romantic ways. Knowing full well the colonial strategy of divide-and-conquer, Édouard Glissant (1997) points out in his book *Poetics of Relations* that a comparative approach of analysis assumes a problematic premise: namely, there are self-contained, distinct, and isolated entities that we can put together so we can find out whether and how there may be similarities and dissimilarities between or among them. In this scenario, doing some comparisons may be interesting and informative, but it really is not imperative. Instead, Glissant proposes a relational approach that is not only premised on mutually constitutive relations but also key to liberation, especially in a circuitously connected world of multiplicity, diversity, and complexity. Glissant (20) is also clear that this relational approach is not "inconsistent with the will to identity" as a basis for decolonial resistance, but only that identity has to remain open to a process of reconsideration and transformation in a shared world of infinite differences.<sup>21</sup>

Glissant's discussion of relation and identity is certainly pertinent to the issue of race/ethnicity, because groups are racialized not in isolation but in relation to one another. There is in Ellison's (1952, 149–75; cf. Mullen 1994) *Invisible Man* a remarkable parable on how production of whiteness is related to the marginalization or concealment of Blackness. As a worker at Liberty Paint, which has "Keep America Pure with Liberty Paints" as its company slogan, the narrator must add "no more and no less" than "ten drops" of "dead black" liquid into each bucket of paint and "stir ... 'til [the liquid] disappears" to produce "the purest white that can be found" (Ellison 1952, 152). According to the narrator's white supervisor, "Nobody makes a paint any whiter"; moreover, this paint, with the telling name of "Optic White," is used for "national monument[s]" and "will cover just about anything" (152–53). This is confirmed by a veteran Black worker in the company who comments that the paint is "so white you can paint a chunka coal and you'd have to crack it open with a sledge hammer

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21. For a more recent work that seeks to emphasize relationships and interdependence without dispensing with identities, see Appiah 2018. Appiah makes basically the same argument in his focused study of W. E. B. Du Bois; see Appiah 2014. See also Le Espiritu's (2016) "critical juxtaposing method" to pursue refugee studies.



to prove it wasn't white clear through" (165). This episode exposes that despite its lily-white appearance, American liberty or American identity could not have been formed without the contributions and exploitations of Black cultures and Black bodies.

If whiteness cannot exist without blackness, the relation between whiteness and blackness was made more stark as well as more complicated by the presence of Asian Americans and the dynamics between the United States and Asia during the 1940s to the 1960s. The rise of Asian Americans as a model minority during this same time period also rested on the denial of indigenous Hawai'ian sovereignty (Wu 2014). One should not forget, of course, that before the 1940s and because of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, many Chinese disguised themselves as Mexicans and even Native Americans to smuggle into the United States through Mexico and Canada, causing lawmakers in the 1920s to debate whether building a "Chinese wall" along the Mexico border could provide an effective deterrence (Lee 2015, 191–209). Relationality among racial/ethnic groups, particularly among minoritized ones, must not be (dis)missed, even though or especially because it may take on different dynamics and power differentials at various points of time. "We" must beware of individualizing identity politics of recognition in ways that (dis)miss "*historical interconnections*" (Mohanty 1995, 69, emphasis original).

Since Prashad's and the Critical Ethnic Studies Association's vision are intercontinental and transnational, let me give one more example: racialization of Asians cannot be understood without knowledge of the histories of Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. With what she calls "the intimacies of four continents," Lisa Lowe (2015, 76) brilliantly shows that "it is necessary to conceive settler colonialism, slavery, indenture, imperial war, and trade together, as braided parts of a world process" of European modernity, which provided freedom for some in the world at the expense of other people in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Lowe's choice of the word *intimacies* is meant to intimate these transnational, transcontinental, transcultural, and transracial/ethnic entailments that are often disavowed or left out of sight, such as how the British East India Company's trade was connected with not only enslavement of indigenous and black bodies in the Americas but also textile manufacturing in Asia.<sup>22</sup>

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22. See also Diana Taylor's (2003, xvii–xviii) suggestion of a hemispheric studies to study the entire Americas and "counter Latin American studies of the mid-twentieth century and NAFTAism of the late twentieth century." With what he calls



The objectives articulated by Critical Ethnic Studies Association represent, in my view, an attempt to challenge “our” disciplinary and racial/ethnic assumptions by pushing for broader attention, greater awareness, and better balance that will decenter whiteness through the establishment of multiple reference points (Szymańko 2008, 2). They are also helpful for racial/ethnic minoritized scholars of the Bible if “we” want to accomplish more than gaining visibility or recognition for “ourselves.” Enlarging the framework of what “we” see and do as racial/ethnic minoritized scholars by being open to both surprising connections and unexpected contentions helps us better illuminate and illustrate contours and configurations of power. Multiple reference points also make our scholarship more relevant to a wider population; minoritized scholarship will hence become less likely to be ghettoized or exoticized as if it were some kind of anthropological specimen or tourist brochure. Most importantly, this shows that “politics, rather than deriving from one identity, may produce many identities” (Gooding-Williams 2006, 118). While internal colonialism and multicultural liberalism render “us” as minoritized within a nation-state, “our” identities and politics are not necessarily limited to race/ethnicity or by national boundary (see Young 2006). In other words, this is not just a call to extend “our” reach, but to engage with more differences so we can continue to evaluate and rethink what “we” do as minoritized biblical scholars.

### Position as Well as Identity

Glissant (1997, 34, 84, 146) uses the image of an archipelago (as opposed to a single island or a lone nation-state) a few times to illustrate his emphasis

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“multidirectional memory,” Michael Rothberg (2009) also argues for unexpected or unacknowledged connections by showing how various decolonial and civil rights movements in different countries across the world used memories of the Holocaust to galvanize support. Rothberg (11) writes, “The model of multidirectional memory posits collective memory as partially disengaged from exclusive versions of cultural identity and acknowledges how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal and cultural sites.” One may also recall that half a century ago, Robert Blauner (1972; 1987), with what he calls “internal colonialism,” was already emphasizing repeatedly the need to connect the “Third World abroad” with the “Third World within.” Of course, “the idea of the Third World” was meant to connect “the European and American ‘New Left’ to the politics of Africa, Asia, and—increasingly—Latin America” (Westad 2007, 106); that is to say, it is a vision of transnational relation and coalition.

on relation. Spivak (2008, 97–131, 214) seems to be talking about something similar with what she calls a “critical regionalism” as she calls for a reimagination of Asia “as one continent in its plurality” with complicities in current global geopolitics in order to go beyond the narrow concerns of identity and nation-state. Included within that book *Other Asias* is a 2004 interview with Spivak (2008, 239–55) titled “Position without Identity.” While many in the academy have found Spivak’s “strategic essentialism” appealing and useful, few have paid adequate attention to this phrase—“position without identity”—which Spivak (e.g., 1996, 215; 1999, 360; 2012, 431, 432, 435, 439; cf. Chakravorty, Milevska, and Barlow 2006, 74) has actually used over a decade on a number of occasions. Moreover, she always uses this phrase as a way to distance herself from an identity politics of recognition, which she sees, despite its oppositional posture, as (1) a premature identification of one’s own experience with others of the same race/ethnicity or national origins and (2) a problematic desire to subscribe to liberal multiculturalism, especially on the part of migrants to the United States (Sanders 2006, 2–3). Instead of being obsessed or becoming narcissistic with one’s identity, Spivak prefers to focus on one’s agency within a disadvantaged sociopolitical position that is material and structural. Rather than aspiring to claim America and risk falling into the trap of culturalism, nationalism, or even fascism, Spivak wants us to set our sight on a larger, transnational frame. As Bernice Johnson Reagon (1983, 358) puts it, “At a certain stage, nationalism is crucial to a people if you are going to ever impact as a group in your own interest. Nationalism at another point becomes reactionary because it is totally inadequate for surviving in the world with many peoples.”

Given how Spivak’s (2012, 429) use of this phrase is linked to her discussion of subalterns and her embrace of Antonio Gramsci’s view of the state—as “both medicine and poison”—that brings about “a permanent educative activism,” I think her reference to position can at least be partly read in connection with what Gramsci (1971) calls “war of positions” between the hegemon and the subaltern: namely, a politics of engagement that reads differentials in power as more fluid and locations of conflict as more widespread.<sup>23</sup>

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23. Spivak (2012, 431–32, 435) herself mentions two particular influences on her understanding of position: Karl Marx and Raymond Williams. That Spivak (1999, 352) has Gramsci’s dynamic and dialectical process in mind may be seen not only in her reference to the “native informant as a reminder of alterity, rather than remain[ing]

With this emphasis on a dynamic and dialectical process that is also more pervasive, one may well question whether and why position and identity are not also dialectically related rather than diametrically opposed in Spivak's emphasis on position (Machida 2008, 17–56; Sarker 2016). Even if her “position without identity” assumes the two as binary opposites, Spivak (1998, 213) should have remembered that the impossibility of fully undoing an opposition is her own deconstructive declaration. If “humanization ... takes place through ... recognition” (Butler 2004, 43), then would an identity politics of recognition not fall into Spivak's (1993, 42, 45–46, 64, 279) category of “what one cannot not want”? While Spivak's “position without identity” may have to do with the connection she makes between this phrase and her focus on subalterns, who, in Spivak's (2012, 430) understanding, are those “removed from all lines of social mobility,” her consistent emphasis on attending to particulars and details should further imply that identity politics of recognition can function differently. Is there not a difference, as I have already implied earlier in my discussion of myself reading as a Latinx or as an African American, if one is primarily seeking recognition or resonance from other minoritized peoples rather than from those of the dominant culture? May one not also perform an identity politics to see whether someone within one's own racial/ethnic minoritized community who has been whitewashed can come to a “shock of recognition” (Wilson 1955) that white is not necessarily right and hence a recognition of self and a reformation of community? Rather than replicating the “object status” of minoritized persons as they become recognized by whites (Cheng 2001, 187–88), this “shock of recognition” or conscientization by minoritized subjects that results in a (re)new(ed) self and community signifies an exercise of agency.

Saying that certain practices of an identity politics of recognition should not be written off is, of course, not saying that they are all “we” need for “our” pursuit of minoritized scholarship. Nor is it saying that this kind of politics should be effective or adequate for every person, in every context, at every moment, and for every purpose.<sup>24</sup> An identity politics of

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caught in some identity forever,” but also in her affirmative mention of an anecdote about Edward Said supposedly saying that, “once the state of Palestine is established, I will become its first critic” (Spivak 2008, 248).

24. For critiques of politics of recognition, see, for instance, Oliver 2001; Povinelli 2002; Coulthard 2014. Note, however, that these critiques tend to proceed from the assumption that recognition is always and only sought by the oppressed from their

recognition is only one move or one step in the long struggle for justice. Despite my questions above, I do think that Spivak's emphasis on position as relational and dynamic can also help us think more and think better about the work of racial/ethnic minoritized biblical scholarship. Although I present minoritized biblical criticism as primarily a case of racial/ethnic difference, the word *minoritized* refers to a position of being made a minor or a minority. In other words, while a minoritized position may be related to one's racial/ethnic identity, it is not necessarily restricted by and cannot be essentialized into any single identity factor, whether it be race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, or national origin. Gramsci's "war of positions" makes it clear that "position" here implies challenges against the hegemon, and hence emphasizes strategic actions for change more than possessions of some kind of identity papers (Sarker 2013, 9–10). Position is relational, subject to change, and not static. How would minoritization look, for example, if I take on a transnational or intersectional frame—or both, as advocated by the Critical Ethnic Studies Association?<sup>25</sup> Depending on the specific context, I may well find myself occupying various positions in the dialectic between the more powerful majority and the less powerful minoritized. Like Uriah Kim, I am not only a minoritized subject of the West but also a Westernized subject of Asia. When I participate in the "one-way internationalism that characterizes [many] pedagogical journeys" by Western or Western-trained biblical scholars to Asia, am I not also taking part in something similar to an "imperial mission" that "risks relegating Asian readers to passive recipients of Western ... knowledge production" (Nakamura 2016, 291)? Also, what does it mean to teach and lecture about Chinese American or Asian American readings of the Bible in China, where Chinese are actually the majority with the power to oppress indigenous tribes or domestic workers coming from other Asian countries such as the Philippines or Indonesia (see Cheung 2004)? My

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oppressors. I am contending here that this particular assumption is not necessarily the point of departure for all practices of identity politics of recognition.

25. Space would not allow me to elaborate here. Since we are more familiar with intersectional analyses, let me point to Takezawa and Okihiro (2016) as one example of how racial/ethnic minoritized scholars may pursue their work in a transnational frame by paying close attention to how different subject positions of scholars—including their location within academic traditions that have been shaped by different nation-states and by neocolonial relations between nation-states—within or across the Pacific lead to different approaches to and interpretations of similar topics.

point here is not to renew another narcissistic search of identity, to create a taxonomy of minoritization or of comparative victimage, or to displace or replace race/ethnicity as *one* consequential basis of minoritization. Instead, I am affirming the need to attend continuously to relationality, contingency, historicity, and specificity, so “we” can be vigilant not only to redefine and refine what or who is minoritized when it is necessary to do so but also to recognize the logic or the relationality of minoritization. In addition, I suggest that racial/ethnic minoritization, in ways comparable to being queer, is “not [just] an identity but [also] an analytic” (Rawson 2010, 41).<sup>26</sup> If I understand, for example, that the Western white subject of post-Enlightenment Europe came into being only through the oppression or the minoritization of others, then my attempts to gain recognition and move out of my own minoritized position may also be dependent on the oppression or minoritization of others (da Silva 2007), including nature or nonhuman animals. In fact, an emphasis on position may free me from the identity politics of “Speaking as a Chinese American or as an Asian American, I ...,” which is often taken by those in power as proof that I am forever trapped within or bound by my racial/ethnic identity. As Lawrence Buell (2005, 7) points out, a rigid or reductionistic identity politics would not allow anyone to speak, for instance, about the environment or about animals, since none of us can “speak *as* the environment, *as* nature, *as* a nonhuman animal.”<sup>27</sup>

### Conclusion

I have identified in this afterword a dilemma for racial/ethnic minoritized readers and readings of the Bible—a dilemma of (in)visibility—and

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26. I added the word *just* in Rawson’s statement for the same reason that I substituted the word *without* in Spivak’s phrase with the word *beyond*. While queer scholars correctly critique “fixed political referent,” their choice to describe such a critique as “subjectless” (Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz 2005, 3) is in my view unfortunate and unhelpful. On this matter of reading and writing *beyond* racial/ethnic identity, see also hooks 2009.

27. Spivak’s (2012, 335–50) own vision for an inclusivity that goes beyond “other Asias” can also be seen in her call to “re-imagine the planet” as an “imperative” or in her use of the term *planetarity* to insist on our acknowledgment of and attention to alterity (Spivak 2015). In his discussion about disability and queer sexuality, Robert McRuer (2006, 57) also writes, “Coming out crip at times involves embracing and at times disidentifying with the most familiar kinds of identity politics.”

I have made several suggestions to address this dilemma. While I am not sure whether these suggestions will work effectively, I am more confident about three things. First, racial/ethnic minoritized scholars cannot allow “our” desire for visibility to be used by others as transparent access to some essentialist truths about “us.” Second, if “we” want to imagine and implement new political affiliations, “we” must make visible systems of domination, and “we” must recognize how “our” minoritization is connected with oppressions in different places and of other communities. At the same time, these affiliations must not be built on some abstract or generalized impression of being minoritized across the globe, but with a humble willingness to acknowledge and historicize various kinds of difference. Finally, as meaningful as racial/ethnic presence or visibility may be, it is not the same as racial/ethnic justice (Beltrán 2014). While there are ways for racial/ethnic minoritized scholars to use and critique identity politics simultaneously and strategically, “we” cannot see recognition of “our” own racial/ethnic minoritized identity within a nation-state as the sole or ultimate goal of our work; instead, remembering the photograph of Sharbat Gula, “we” must remain focused on critiquing and transforming structural injustice that is largely inseparable from racialization, including how racialization functions to make “our” minoritized works (in)visible, move existing margins, and create new minoritized others within a global neoliberal and imperialistic structure.

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