

POSTCOLONIAL INTERVENTIONS



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POSTCOLONIAL INTERVENTIONS
Essays in Honor of R.S. Sugirtharajah

edited by
Tat-siong Benny Liew



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“Slave Wo/men and Freedom: Some Methodological Reflections”

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To Sugi,
who,
with courage, humor, humility, and seemingly endless energy,
shows and teaches us
that there are always other ways to see
and other voices to hear

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PREFACE

I can't remember when I met R.S. Sugirtharajah face to face for the first time, but whenever it was, I had already been learning from him for years. His edited volume, *Voices from the Margin*, showed up on the syllabi of a number of different courses I took as a PhD student at Vanderbilt University in the United States. I do remember clearly, though, the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, at which Sugi asked me to send him something for a special issue on postcolonialism that he was putting together for the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*. The piece I gave him was my very first contribution to published works in New Testament studies, making him one of the most valued teachers and mentors with whom I never shared a classroom.

I have, however, often shared a table with him in various parts of Asia, and unofficially, but invariably at the annual SBL meeting for at least the past four years. Over the years, I've been impressed by the contrast between his prolific writing and his unassuming, almost taciturn, demeanor. Despite his reputation and prominence in biblical/theological studies and his incomparable expertise in global and postcolonial biblical scholarship, he has never been one to demand the limelight or monopolize the microphone. To honor his humble and self-effacing example, I offer this brief preface to what has turned out to be a duly substantial salute to Sugi and his scholarship.

This Festschrift came about because so many of Sugi's friends and colleagues lamented the fact that schedule conflicts and other pressing obligations prevented them from contributing to the first Festschrift that D.N. Premnath edited to honor him. The amazing response and quality of scholarship that comprise this second volume in Sugi's honor—and the rigorous engagement his scholarship continues to elicit—are a fitting tribute to both the scholar and his work.

Tat-siong Benny Liew

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INTRODUCTION: INTERVENING ON THE POSTCOLONIAL

Tat-siong Benny Liew

Perhaps it is true that for most people within the guild of biblical and/or theological studies, the name R.S. Sugirtharajah first became familiar with his editing of the anthology, *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (1991). While Sugirtharajah has continued to work with and on the concept of margin (e.g. Sugirtharajah 1995; 2006b; 2008), he has also become well known—and, in fact, in the words of one of the contributors to this volume, ‘ubiquitous’ (Moore 2000: 185)—in pushing both biblical and theological studies toward a postcolonial turn (e.g. Sugirtharajah 1998; 2002; 2003; 2006a).

What I find interesting is that as Sugirtharajah takes this postcolonial turn, he did so first by authoring a book on ‘Asian biblical hermeneutics’ (1998), and hence linking it with his idea of ‘margin’. A decade later, however, Sugirtharajah begins to link postcolonialism less closely with ‘margin’ but more with ‘diaspora’. As he reflects on the developments since the first edition of *Voices*, Sugirtharajah states, first of all, his disappointment at the ‘margin’ as not only a less-than-ideal place of protest but also one that has been appropriated by reactionary and fundamentalist forces (2008: 9-10). After commenting on three more developments that are mainly elaborations on his dissatisfaction with the ‘margin’—namely, ‘scriptural simplicities’, ‘atomization of the field’, and ‘hijacking liberation’ (2008: 10-12)—Sugirtharajah turns more hopeful with his mention of postcolonialism as the fifth recent development (2008: 12-13). Most pertinent to my purposes here is that Sugirtharajah names ‘diasporic hermeneutics’ immediately after postcolonialism as not only the sixth development but also the mark of the current hermeneutical landscape (2008: 13).

One can detect this ‘margin-to-postcolonialism-to-diaspora’ movement also in a recent interview. Asked to compare what the interviewer sees as his two ‘landmark volumes’—*Voices from the Margin* (1991) and *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (2006a)—Sugirtharajah responds by linking ‘margins’ with Latin American liberation theology, Korean *minjung* theology, the Filipino theology of struggle, and Third World feminist theologies from ‘former colonies’ but postcolonialism with multiculturalism and ethnic minorities in ‘both the old and new imperial centers’ (Premnath 2007: 154). In fact, when

asked more pointedly about postcolonial criticism, Sugirtharajah not only makes a point to highlight again that ‘migrancy, diaspora, and hybridity... have been taken up by postcolonialism’ (2007: 157), but also follows that with an engaged conversation on ‘racial/ethnic scholars’, ‘diasporic interpreters’, ‘border-crossing context’, and ‘cross-cultural hermeneutics’ for basically the rest of the interview (2007: 157-62).

Like Sugirtharajah, I should admit here that I ‘may have over-stressed’ (Sugirtharajah 2008: 14) Sugirtharajah’s tendency to read the focus on margin, postcolonialism, and diaspora as a linear movement. Over-stressed or not, I would like to explore in this introduction a different reading that locates the postcolonial as somewhere between margins and diasporas and how such a reading may stress and stretch the margins of postcolonial criticism. Rather than seeing postcolonialism as moving from margin to diaspora, perhaps we should look at it as moving back and forth—or a shuttling—between margin and diaspora. To put it yet another way, margin and diaspora are not either/or choices, but both/and conditions or considerations of and for the postcolonial.

Contextualizing the Issues

The meaning of the word ‘postcolonial’ is notoriously difficult to pin down. Its elasticity and elusiveness have led, for instance, Peter Childs and Patrick Williams to ruminate for pages on not only the ‘when’ and ‘where’ but also the ‘who’ and ‘what’ of the postcolonial (1997: 1-15). Half a decade later but not yet satisfied with or sure of how to place the postcolonial, David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson would start from what they had identified as the three clusters of ‘generative ambiguities’ that constitute postcolonial studies—namely, (1) its simultaneous commitment to anti-foundationalism and ethical critique; (2) its focus on colonialism as its object of study that it also disavows; and (3) its desire to transverse every discipline and hence the potential of being a homeless inquiry that lacks distinction—and venture into an experiment of ‘relocating postcolonialism’ (2002). The porous tendency—and hence uncertainty, instability, or perhaps even indeterminacy—of the postcolonial can be seen in the ambiguous status of the so-called Empire studies within postcolonial biblical studies. While Stephen D. Moore openly questions if works by Warren Carter and Richard Horsley really qualify as postcolonial (2006: 17-19), Carter and Horsley are both contributors to the landmark publication, *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, which is edited by Fernando F. Segovia and—yes, yet once more—Sugirtharajah (2007).

Like postcolonial biblical studies’ dubiety or flexibility around the definition of postcolonial, Sugirtharajah’s present propensity to couple postcolonialism with diaspora after decoupling it from margin is a reflection of

developments within postcolonial studies in the larger world of literary/cultural studies. As the academic capital of globalization accumulates in ever accelerating speed, more and more theorists have begun to not only link the postcolonial with the global (e.g. Hoogvelt 1997; Bishop 2003; Joseph and Wilson 2006; Krishnaswamy and Hawley 2007; Lie 2008; Schueller 2009) but also announce that the colonial imagery of dominant centers and distant margins is all but obsolete (e.g. Cheah and Robbins, 1998; Jameson and Miyoshi 1998; Breckenridge, Pollock, Bhabha, and Chakrabarty 2002). Instead, as the theory goes, the new sociopolitical, postcolonial, or neocolonial order should be interpreted and intervened in terms of border-crossing, cosmopolitan, transnational, or postnational diasporas.

Leaving a deeper discussion of diaspora to my next section, I will give just one more specific example of this trend by pointing to the influential work of Arjun Appadurai. Going all the way back to 1993 when he contributed an article to a volume on *Orientalism and the Post-Colonial Predicament* (1993a), Appadurai published another article, 'Patriotism and Its Futures', to describe this phenomenon called globalization in postnational terms (1993b). Simply put, the out-datedness of nation-states means, for Appadurai, that global (trafficking) order should, from now on, be read through the lens of the diaspora. I chose Appadurai because his early piece contains not only most if not all of the vocabulary that mark Sugirtharajah's turn from margin to diaspora, but also a similarly hopeful sense of diaspora's liberating potential that Sugirtharajah seems to share (Appadurai 1993b: 425-26).

I will have more to say about this hopeful view of diaspora, but let me point out now that the move from margin to diaspora is not actually new, whether one is talking about Sugirtharajah or Appadurai. The famed Chicago sociologist, Robert E. Park, has made a matching move in his studies of human migration in the first half of the twentieth century: migrating from using the figure of a stranger—or what Park calls a 'marginal man' (1928)—to study the migrant, Park shifted within a span of ten years to talk about the migrant in terms of one who is caught between two cultures and racial tensions because of a dispersion of people known as diaspora (1939). Of course, Park is expanding the use of diaspora here from its 'classical' use in reference to the dispersion of the Jews to the migration of Asians in Park's own time. Diaspora's historical association with the Jews as well as its linguistic origin in Greek certainly help underscore the legitimacy of Sugirtharajah's diasporic hermeneutics to the Bible. After all, the word appears in not only the Septuagint but also the New Testament (Jn 7.35; Jas 1.1; 1 Pet. 1.1). If diaspora has become in this day and age a global word (Cohen 1997; Van Hear 1998), it is also one that fits particularly well with not only numerous contemporary readers but also many ancient writers of the biblical world. I have no need or interest to contradict or conceal

the importance of diaspora as a lens for and focus of (biblical/theological) hermeneutics, especially in light of the term's early and continual entanglement with religions (Cohen 1997: 1-30; Smart 1987; Vertovec 2008). My reservation or contention has to do with an interpretation of diaspora as a departure from—even desertion of—margin in postcolonial interventions.

At the Margins of Diasporas

Traditionally, diaspora has always had three constitutive elements: (1) the scattered community or people in dispersion; (2) places where they have (been) moved to (known conventionally as host countries or societies); and (3) their land of origin. What distinguishes current diasporas within the framework of globalization is that they are no longer one directional—and often also one-time—movements from the community's land of origin to a host country. Instead, a dispersed community is making circulatory back-and-forth movements—and hence keeping close connections—between these two locales (Flores 2009: 25, 30). The triadic relation of globalized diasporas may at times be more than bi-local, as members of the dispersed community in various host countries may also network among themselves. This 'interpolarity' (Dufoix 2008: 103)—or even polypolarity—causes some, as I have intimated earlier, to suggest that we now have an alternative to nation-states: if poles may now be connected without a center, then the focus on an imperial nation-state dominating over other marginal nation-states has simply been eclipsed and hence outlived its critical and political serviceability.

The transportation and communication that transform diasporas have much to do, of course, with the most recent technological breakthrough. Computer and digital technology in particular have, for some, so transcended the limits of time and space that diasporas may be understood as 'deterritorialized' and in terms of 'ubiquity' (Dufoix 2008: 99-100, 103). Margins are, once again, supposed to vanish with this deterritorialized ubiquity, as those in diasporas are no longer experiencing any 'dual absence'; namely, the marginalized experience of not belonging to 'there' in their land of origin *and* not at home in the 'here' of their host society. With one click at the computer, diaspora virtually becomes, through cyberspace, Michel Foucault's 'heterotopia' (1986); it challenges not only the dominance of the center but also the dominant center-margin paradigm by rendering, in a sense, both 'here' and 'there' less meaningful if not altogether meaningless (Dufoix 2008: 103)!

What one must not forget, however, is that Foucault's 'heterotopia' is not a freely accessible space, even or especially because, Foucault suggests, it tends to give an illusion to be so (1986: 26-27). Likewise, accessibility to cyberspace is partly dependent on which side of the digital divide one is located. After all, diasporas are not only geographical, cultural, social,

or political but also economic phenomena. The kind of physical, cultural, and virtual mobility—and hence liberating capacity—being connected with diaspora and celebrated by critics like Appadurai and—to choose a more familiar name within the circle of biblical and religious studies—Daniel Boyarin (1994: 228-60) may well be true of cosmopolitans who, like Appadurai and Boyarin themselves, are relatively well endowed with both cultural and economic capital. This is, however, not true of most—not to mention all—who are in diaspora. As Pico Iyer writes:

One of the most troubling features of the globalism we celebrate is that the so-called linking of the planet has, in fact, intensified the distance between people: the richest 358 people in the world, by UN calculations, have a financial worth as great as that of 2.3 billion others, and even in the United States, the prosperous home of egalitarianism, the most wired man in the land (Bill Gates) has a net worth larger than that of 40 percent of the country's households, or perhaps 100 million of his compatriots combined (2000: 25-26).

While scholars have been busying themselves with various typologies of diaspora (e.g. Cohen 1997; Dufoix 2008: 62-66), I think Juan Flores is on target to emphasize the need to articulate the differences between 'diasporas of privilege' and 'diasporas of deprivation' (2009: 20), or, in the vocabulary of John Armstrong's much earlier proposal, 'mobilized and proletariat diasporas' (1976). What 'deprivation' or 'proletariat' signifies is that some diasporas are often imposed on people of underdeveloped countries by the need for cheap labor in host countries that are overdeveloped (Christopher, Pybus, and Rediker 2007). My choice of adjectives here—'underdeveloped' and 'overdeveloped'—is deliberate, as it features the persistent power asymmetries that exist among nation-states because of colonialism's ongoing legacies. Diaspora does not invalidate and cannot become an alibi to cover up the reality of what Timothy Brennan calls 'the global periphery'—or margin, if you will—that facilitates and makes possible 'the mundane, results-oriented process of profit-making' (2005: 101). In contrast to the privileged and mobile cosmopolitans, this difference in economic situation or class puts some diasporic communities in an alienating relation with not only its land of origin but also population in its host country. As Min Hyoung Song insightfully points out, in addition to having limited access to travel and cyberspace, those in diaspora to provide cheap labor often find themselves in competition—and hence in conflict—with locals who are also economically deprived within the host population (2005: 181). In addition to frictions between a diasporic community and locals, one may add that hostilities may also develop between *different* diasporic communities of deprivation within the same host country.

This sense of marginalization in a host country is not limited to those who experience power asymmetries in terms of economics. Racial/ethnic

difference may also exact a high cost for those in diaspora. As the internment of Japanese Americans after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor shows, host populations—especially though by no means exclusively state officials—have a tendency to presume a racially/ethnically marked diasporic community guilty of disloyalty unless proven otherwise. Commenting on Chang-rae Lee's critically acclaimed debut novel *Native Speaker* (1995), Song observes that for Asian diasporas in the United States 'to look beyond the nation's borders is to engage in a potentially unpatriotic act' (2005: 173). One can hear in Song here a dissonant echo to Appadurai's tune that postnational globalization will transform narrow patriotism into a kind of diasporic nationalisms (1993b). While such diasporic nationalisms may be tolerated or even encouraged if and when a host country like the United States is on good terms with the nation-state of one's land of origin, attempts to forge or maintain any kind of transnational network by a racial/ethnic other are more likely to be viewed with suspicions and accusations (Chen 2005). In the aftermath of the 9/11 attack against the United States in 2001, many of us have witnessed once again the power of a nation-state—in fact, an imperial center—to patrol its external borders from unwanted entries and surveil its Arab American community within as potential Islamic terrorists against the state, even or especially as it ignores other national sovereignties and international treaties to pursue its own interest across the globe at the same time.

This presumed disloyalty has the potential effect of discouraging a diasporic people—particularly those who are racially/ethnically marked and/or from the margins of the third world—from reaching beyond the imperial center to foster global relations with their land of origin and other peripheral places. Centering their focus on the local affairs of their host country creates, however, even more marginalizing effects. Again, as Lee's Korean American protagonist shows, the burden of proof on a diasporic people can become so heavy that they will spy on fellow members of their own community to erase any margin of error regarding their patriotism to the host country (Song 2005: 174). In other words, the imperial center is always already exerting pressure on the diasporas so that charges of betrayal are heard not only against but also within a diasporic community on whether one's loyalty is 'here' or 'there' (Bow 2001). There are differences between diasporas of deprivation and diasporas of privilege, but there are also differences within each type of diaspora. As Floya Anthias suggests, typologies of diaspora must not fail to acknowledge and articulate the difference that gender, class, and/or racial/ethnic difference makes *within* diasporas (1998).¹ One cannot ignore margins if '[d]iasporas do not correspond to

1. Although I cannot spend much time on this, let me point out briefly that the margins or marginal nature of a diasporic community may exist vis-à-vis its land of origin as well as its host countries. Those in diaspora may be in opposition to the

neatly circumscribed social units but tend to be messy and ragged at the edges' (Flores 2009: 17).

Margins of diasporas also exist in the sense that many diasporas are bonded together by a shared history of marginalization and even trauma. For example, Anahide Ter-Minassian has proposed that the 1915 genocide is a 'matrix event' that creates a 'memory of catastrophe' and hence the modern Armenian diaspora (1989: 129). Tracing the ghosts or haunting memories of Korean women who provided sexual favors for military personnel of the United States during the Korean War, Grace Cho similarly shows the Korean diaspora in the United States not only *has* but also *as* a genealogy of trauma (2008). Song seems to arrive at a similar conclusion on the basis of Lee's *Native Speaker*:

[T]he culture that holds Koreans and Korean Americans together as one definable group, and makes them unique, is not a culture of shared practices, habits, language, music, cuisine, or a host of other types of activities usually associated with a group's making of self-identity.... Rather, a culture of shared traumas, in the crucible of severe dislocation, violence, and widespread pain, produces these activities as a common possession (2005: 178).

Referring also to the African diaspora in the United States, Song sounds as if this is a generalizable insight. If so, the making or breaking of a diaspora actually hinges on whether such a history of trauma will continue to be shared by a people (2005: 178-80, 185-92). If a people is regularly and continually being marginalized and afflicted, the stronger their affinity and community—and hence their diaspora—will also become. If not, connection with one's fellow members within a diasporic community—not to mention one's land of origin—will likely dissipate with time and space, and a diasporic subject may become disciplined by, bound to, and assimilated into the host country or imperial center. If Song is correct, then two

current government that is in power in their land of origin. In addition, one of the most popular metaphor for diasporas seems to be that of a tree. While South Asians use a banyan and Armenians a walnut tree (Dufoix 2008: 50), Tu Wei-ming goes with a more generic choice, *The Living Tree*, to title his well-known anthology on Chinese diasporas (1994). This tree metaphor betrays—in spite of and in contrast to Tu's own articulated intention to de-center the ancient, geographical China—that the variety of branches and stems that represents the diaspora for Tu is still dependent on 'an invisible but life-sustaining set of roots' through a tree trunk (Ang 2000: 289). The tree metaphor implies then the need of those in diaspora for something central (the homeland) to ground or center their being or identity so they will not be culturally drowned in their crossings of oceans. What we may have then is something akin to a 'dendritic' system in which a hierarchical relation exists between the homeland as center and the diaspora as margin (Dufoix 2008: 38-39). If those in diaspora buy into this system, diaspora can become nostalgic, nativist, reactionary, and exclusionary.

important implications follow. If what happens at the margins creates and maintains diaspora, then margin and diaspora are mutually constitutive in a back-and-forth movement rather than mutually exclusive as if in a linear progression. If what happens at the margins challenges and disrupts the subject-making process of a nation-state, then margin should remain indispensable to Sugirtharajah's project of protest.

Articulating differences between and within various diasporas will help bring out the political dimension that is perhaps too easily downplayed in studies of diasporas. Margin, as a critical idea that highlights limit or what is beyond and/or below, accentuates alienation, dissatisfaction, dissension, and contention. James Clifford seems to have a similar aim when he recommends changing the course of diaspora studies from taxonomies or typologies; rather, Clifford proposes, one may read locality relationally and hence focus on diaspora's borders (1997: 245-54). Clifford is pointing to the need to read how a diaspora defines itself vis-à-vis homeland and host country, and thus how the term border—or, we may say, margin—presupposes an interpretation of and intervention on power differential. In addition to—or perhaps instead of—coming up with more longer and newer nomenclature like 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' (Bhabha 1996), 'transnationalism from below' (Smith and Guarnizo 1998), or 'grassroots globalization' (Appadurai 2001) to point out and make distinctions from a hegemonic and (neo)colonialist project of globalization 'from above', a simple refusal to displace the idea and importance of margin would help register the centrality of all kinds of power differential in diasporas.² If diasporas are indeed about hybridity (Hall 1994: 401-402), creolization (Flores 2009: 26-29), and therefore disruptions of binaries, then diaspora needs not—indeed, should not—become the binary other of margin.

Stressing the Margins of Postcolonial Studies

Song's reference to the African diaspora in the United States provides a further corrective to Sugirtharajah's postcolonial narrative of moving from margin to diaspora. Just as he leaves out black theology in his description of and reflection on margin (Premnath 2007: 154), Sugirtharajah seems to have forgotten about *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Felder 1991) when he talks about the emergence of diasporic hermeneutics. This is in many ways a disappointing surprise not only because this ground-breaking volume actually appeared in the same

2. Note that Sugirtharajah makes a brief mention of and even gives a passing nod to 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' (Premnath 2007: 164-65). However, he does not seem to see or is not willing to acknowledge the link between 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' and a less mutually exclusive view of margin/diaspora.

year as his first edition of *Voices from the Margin*, but also because one of the founding texts for contemporary diaspora studies is Paul Gilroy's book on the 'black diaspora', *The Black Atlantic* (1993). The publication date of Cain Hope Felder's volume shows that margin and diaspora, even within biblical studies, are far less linear and much more linked than Sugirtharajah is presenting.

The way *Native Speaker* mentions both Asians and Africans in diaspora in the United States provokes for Song a picture of competing diasporas—'one based on single-ethnic solidarity and transnational connectivity and the other on multiethnic coalition-building and confinement to the U.S. nation-state' (2005: 185)—and an open question about the possibility of 'a third notion of diaspora' (2005: 169). Though Song is much briefer on this and less certain if it will be possible, his third notion seems to be one that incorporates and balances the first two notions of diasporas: a generation of Asian Americans who 'participate fully in the discussions, struggles, and movements now taking place on *national* and *international* stages' (2005: 197; emphasis added).

I would like to use Song's third notion to stress and stretch the margins of postcolonial studies, and suggest a more concrete way on how diaspora may couple with margin in our critical work. As I have already mentioned, Sugirtharajah features diasporic hermeneutics as an emergence of note after expressing his dissatisfaction with margin and the rise of postcolonialism. Since he explicitly refers to the *Semeia* volume on Asian America that I co-edited with Gale A. Yee (2002)—which, ironically, is also the very last issue of that now dead-and-buried journal—to illustrate what he sees as the next *emergent* criticism (2008: 13), I will develop my thoughts on diasporic hermeneutics here mainly with and through Asian American studies. Let us, however, see how Sugirtharajah presents diasporic hermeneutics again as basically a binary opposite to 'margin'. Not only does diasporic hermeneutics make 'regional-based theologies such as African, Asian or Latin American almost redundant', but the two are also 'driven and motivated by different agendas', as well as 'summon and anchor their work in different families of authors and texts' (Sugirtharajah 2008: 13-14).

Sugirtharajah is, of course, accurate in a sense. What he describes is akin to Song's competing diasporas; we may call them two versions or notions of the postcolonial. Without denying the differences that may exist between the postcolonial in, say, Asia and Asian America, I would like to propose that a third notion may also be possible. Instead of seeing margin/diaspora, national/international, local/global, or vernacular/cosmopolitan as antithetical, postcolonialism—like feminism or religion—may articulate a politics and a practice that reorganizes the terrain altogether rather than be relegated to one side of a binary. Postcolonial work that shuttles between margin and diaspora should move beyond its margin of comfort and/or convenience to

put together ethnic studies (a main resource for my work in Asian American biblical hermeneutics) and area studies (arguably the most 'regional-based' discipline in the larger academy).

I have briefly articulated and argued for this coupling of ethnic and area studies in my more recent work on Asian American biblical hermeneutics (2008: 13), as well as been involved in the Society of Asian Biblical Studies—yes, the same society that Sugirtharajah describes as an 'exciting' development and has high hopes for (Premnath 2007: 165)—from its very beginning. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has also suggested that the discipline of Comparative Literature needs to couple with Area Studies if it is to revive itself (2003). While Spivak has also presented this elsewhere as a move from 'colonial discourse studies to transnational cultural studies' (1999: ix-x), her most recent book, *Other Asias* (2008), shows that Asia is her major area of interest. Card-carrying Asian Americanists of different ethnicity, gender, and generation—like Michael Omi (1988), Sheng-mei Ma (1998), David Palumbo-Liu (1999), as well as Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa (2001)—have likewise argued that Asian American Studies must move beyond the cultural nationalist emphasis of its first twenty or thirty years to attend to the constant crossings between the United States and Asia. Instead of making 'region-based' studies 'redundant' (Sugirtharajah 2008: 13), these scholars are saying that we need to give area studies—which is more national or regional than global—renewed focus and attention.

Of course, area studies has a loaded history. It has been known to have its beginning in times of war. Whether one highlights the time between the two World Wars or that of the Cold War, area studies was invented in the 1940s and 50s to enable, at least partly, the government of the United States to not only intervene but also advance and benefit in the structuring of global power. For example, when the Office of Strategic Services was formed during the Second World War 'to provide the President and key military officials with the information necessary to fight the war', it was made up of two historians, two economists, and one expert each on China, Russia, Africa, South America and Germany (Robinson 2004: 135). This office is, of course, a precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency; both are established to ensure and promote the interests of the United States in various corners or margins, if not exactly 'to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1.8). With the passing of the National Defense Education Act in 1958, generous federal funding—from \$500,000 at its inception to \$14 million in the mid 1960s—was given to area studies centers and scholars under the Act's Title VI program to gather information on areas considered to be critical to 'national security' (Bonnell and Breslauer 2004: 222-23). As area studies experts provided intelligence analyses as well as language and cultural training for government officers, they often perpetuated old and produced new forms of Orientalist knowledge about the non-Western world.

In contrast, ethnic studies seems to represent a contradictory, even incompatible direction and commitment. While one seems to be about international surveillance by the United States, the other is about multicultural struggles within the United States. With Asian American Studies' cultural nationalist focus to 'claim America' as well as its social protest and anti-authority ethos, the movement to cross back toward Asia and Asian studies sounds like a double cross that betrays its ethics of resistance. This crossover sounds even more suspicious as the United States government has once again entered a time of war and uncertainty because of not only 9/11 but also the economic threat that is coming from across the Pacific.

My characterization of area studies is undeniably a caricature, since the field has not been frozen by its origin and is no longer a 'solely US based institutional or intellectual activity' (Dirks 2004: 369). Moreover, overlaps and overpasses have always already existed between ethnic and area studies despite the conventional narrative that—note here the similarity to Sugirtharajah's postcolonial narrative from margin to diaspora—the decline of area studies in the 1970s had to do with the United States government's need to attend to the *domestic* challenge of the civil rights movement, and hence the rise of ethnic studies during the same period. Just as area studies may have occasions and needs to deal with racial/ethnic conflicts, racial/ethnic minorities within the United States may influence the desirability and feasibility of research on a particular nation or area. One can also point to the specific example of Melville Herskovits, an anthropologist from the United States who was so prominent in pioneering African studies that Northwestern University has established its Library of African Studies in his name, and the African Studies Association has named a prestigious annual book award after him. Part of Herskovits' legacy in African Studies lies, however, in his study of African cultural retentions among Blacks in the United States (e.g. 1958; 1964; 1966), so his branch of African Studies actually studies African American as much as African cultures. The blurring between these two studies also makes sense given the tenuous relations they both have with established disciplines within the humanities as well as the social sciences; one may say that breaking disciplinary boundaries is part of the DNA of both. Like margin and diaspora, one should not see them as mutually exclusive or only in competition. Instead, area studies may be seen as paving the way for ethnic studies, or ethnic studies may be viewed as a type of area studies; it just focuses on a different area: what is known as the United States.

Without denying my own complicity in the global economy and the imperialism of the United States to claim any kind of ethical purity, let me try to suggest how one may conceptualize or theorize constructively the crossing of these two studies that seem to find itself and each other at a theoretical crossroads.

Since I started this section with a reference to the black diaspora and the need for multiracial/ethnic coalition, let me refer now to a black intellectual. While most people remember W.E.B. Du Bois' declaration, 'the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line', from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1996: xx), many have forgotten that Du Bois actually made that very statement first not only in France as part of the 1900 Pan-African Conference but also in a speech that he titled 'To the Nations of the World' (1995). For Du Bois, arguably the most iconic figure within ethnic studies on African Americans, the 'Negro problem' or the question of race in the United States needs to be dealt with not only in terms of cultural nationalism but also 'from the setting and in the name of a transnational gathering of men and women' (Edwards 2003: 2). Du Bois demonstrates, in his typically prophetic manner, that most cultures and societies do not operate in self-enclosed ways. Just as Philip Curtin (1990), Joseph Roach (1996), and Hortense J. Spillers (2003) have highlighted the need to look at black slavery in a larger, trans-Atlantic frame, let me propose reading the crossing between Asian and Asian American Studies as an attempt to—in Curtin's language—go beyond the 'plantation complex' and redraw the boundaries to create a different type of regional, trans-Pacific focus. Spanning both shores of the Pacific, this 'critical regionalism' (Spivak 2008: 1)—or a 'yellow Pacific', if you will—is no longer an isolated locale that shuts out the rest of the world, but it is also not so global that the local is suffocated or engulfed. It is not a cultural nationalism that casts out the F.O.B.—'fresh-off-the-boat'—as a reminder of one's own unsuccessful assimilation, but it also does not coddle a premature 'denationalization' (Wong 1995) or post-nationalism that denies the place and power of nation-states. It considers margin/diaspora, global/local, and international/national as 'intersectional realities rather than competing categories' (Lipsitz 2001: 303), and it talks about reterritorialization rather than deterritorialization.

Instead of thinking of this reterritorialized region as merely a larger trans-Pacific spread with clear boundaries or margins, cultural geographers have suggested using a handkerchief to imagine a less flat or static 'spatial web of interrelatedness' (Hones 2004: 48). Since a handkerchief can be spread out, folded up, or even torn up, different points can come into relation with or be separated from each other, just as margins and borders—though always in existence—may shrink, expand, or shift shape. Like Clifford's relational understanding of locality, this understanding of space emphasizes therefore relation and movement more than location and settlement, and implies for me a regionalism with unpredictable crossings as well as multiple and movable centers and multiple and movable margins. It does not map the region into a single center set against a periphery, or a simple homeland that filters or flows out in diaspora. It highlights instead not only the circuitous 'transits' that people may make across the Pacific but also the various 'sites'

that they may have settled and found meaningful along the way on both sides of the Pacific (Lim, Gamber, Sohn and Valentino 2006).

With the alternative emphasis on sites and transits, 'home', in terms of land and/or culture, is no longer an underground grounding that dictates one's being, or homogenizes the living and essentializes the being of everyone who hails from that land or culture. Instead of reifying place, race, or culture, home becomes something historical rather than organic. Home becomes now, in fact, a site that is also in transit (see also Kain 1997). Revisioning a trans-Pacific region means then a re-reading of home that takes into serious account its multi-locality as well as its re-routing. Home, in this case, is not a single location that one only 'returns' to. After all, a Chinese may—by choice and/or by necessity—'make' a home in Taiwan and Singapore before coming to the United States. In the United States, this same person may move from coast to coast, only to decide to take a job offer and 'make' a living as well as a new home in Vietnam.

This sentence about multiple home-making back and forth across the Pacific should not be read as if these homes are all the same. A critical regionalism must acknowledge the differences not only across the Pacific, but also within either side of the ocean. Within the United States, I am a clear racial minority in Topeka, Kansas, less of one in Berkeley, California. I will, however, actually be part of the racial majority in Hong Kong, but part of a powerful yet disliked ethnic minority in Indonesia. A critical regionalism must not forget that there is more than one Asian America, and there are, as Spivak puts it, 'other Asias' (2008; see also Hu-DeHart 1999: 17-18). After all, arbitrary margins and a dynamic reading of place signify historical rather than inherent relations, so people within any given spatial web of interrelatedness do not necessarily share any homogeneous—not to mention 'natural'—traits or characteristics. Their relations, as my example about Topeka, Berkeley, Hong Kong, and Indonesia partly illustrates, may also involve competition, oppression, and exploitation, in which people not only cross the Pacific but also get crossed and double crossed by others within the same continent and across the ocean. Examining and exposing these webs of struggles and betrayals across and around the Pacific may also help forestall both Asian nations and the United States from using trans-Pacific exchanges as excuses to claim a moral superiority that is unwarranted.

My focus on reterritorialization with sites and transits further means that identity will neither be stable nor single. Michel de Certeau has famously compared readers to travelers; reading texts, he suggests, is like poaching land, and 'one "reads" landscape the way one reads a text' (1984: 170). Julia Kristeva has made similar connections when she uses the term 'transposition' to talk about both intertextuality and intersubjectivity. For Kristeva, neither a text nor a self is ever self-sufficient; it does not exist in the world by itself, but is caught up in a criss-crossing web of cross-referencing

relations with other texts or subjectivities (1980: 66). I hope the language here reminds you of the web of interconnectedness in regionalism, but let me cross read de Certeau and Kristeva, and suggest that those sites and transits I referred to earlier become a kind of textual encounters that constitute the very historicity with which one interprets and imagines the world, shapes one's existence as socio-political subject, and hence fashions one's identity.

Identity is, after all—and please notice the language of travel implied here—‘[a way] of making sense of our experience’ (Mohanty 2000: 43; my emphasis), and thus ‘something that has to be *routinely* created and sustained in [one’s] reflexive activities’ (Giddens 1991: 52; emphasis added). Just as the theory of intertextuality fragments the identity of a text as a creative course and combination of absorbing and transforming other texts, my emphasis on reterritorializing a trans-Pacific region and re-routing home implies identity as a peculiar process or chain of intersubjective remarking and remaking that is not necessarily complete or coherent, even though, as Andre Lorde observes, one is ‘constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of [one’s self] and present this as a meaningful whole’ (1984: 121). The boundaries or margins of the self—like those of a discipline, text, or perhaps a nation—are fluid, permeable, and constantly open to reconfiguration. I am both a Chinese American and an American Chinese, a seemingly simple switch of word order that implies not only a transformative transportation and translation but also conflicting loyalties—despite pressures and demands from both sides that my loyalty should be singular and undivided. A (perhaps too?) playful exploration of the fluidity of identity is Gish Jen’s *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996), in which Mona, a teenager, decides that if a Chinese like herself can be an American, then it is also okay for her as a Chinese American to become Jewish. The point here is that identity is not something immutable, impenetrable, or inherent, but an invention of self that not only involves improvisation and the incorporation of others but also facilitates intervention. As Mona describes, her desire is ‘to be not Wasp, and not black, and not as Jewish as Jewish can be; and not from Chinatown, either’ (1996: 231).

Without denying the double-edged potentials of a fluid or fragmentary identity for both the privileged and the deprived, let me quickly point to its potential to not only undo the Orientalist homogenization and essentialization of identity, but also—in a way that is consistent with a trans-Pacific focus—displace though not replace the national or nationalist emphasis. As my identity-switch between being a Chinese American and an American Chinese shows, my identity is marked by enough ambiguities and contradictions that it cannot be a captive to any single nation. Instead, there is a level of identification and a level of disidentification with both cultural nationalism within the United States and ethnic nationalism across

the Pacific. According to Lisa Lowe, disidentification ‘expresses a space... [that] can be rearticulated in oppositional forms... [and] allows for the exploration of alternative political and cultural subjectivities’ (1996: 103–104; see also Lipsitz 2001: 299). This opening can be a move, I propose, from identity politics—whether cultural, racial, or national—to a focus on an international economic and social justice that does not prioritize identity or national integration. Like de Certeau’s poacher who does not own but trespasses on private properties of others, one draws from and jumps on resources available from various sites and transits liberally and flexibly, without pledging allegiance to any cultural, racial, or national canons or canonical standards, for the sake of justice making. By reterritorializing a trans-Pacific region, one’s identity and community may become and remain open rather than closed, enclosing, and predetermined. ‘New spaces’ often emerge when one is willing to ‘question the deeply ingrained logic of binary opposition, of mutual exclusion’ (Weber 2001: 135). In the field of biblical/theological studies, diasporic hermeneutics like Asian American biblical interpretation and theology does not negate or make redundant Asian biblical interpretation and theology. Instead, there needs to be greater crossings between them to help bring about a new hermeneutical landscape.

Reshaping a Field

Maybe it is only appropriate that this volume to honor and engage Sugirtharajah’s work begins with this introductory essay on margins, movements, and reterritorialization, even or perhaps especially given my essay’s tangential or marginal relation to biblical/theological studies. Why? Because reshaping the landscape of the biblical/theological field is what Sugirtharajah’s career is all about. Feeling restless with(in) an academic discipline that has become inflexible and incapable of dealing with change or challenge and agitated by the excuse of ‘academic anomie’ that denies those from the margins—in terms of geography, race/ethnicity, and/or disciplinary persuasion—meaningful access to the field, Sugirtharajah intervenes at the point where disciplinary functions and values converge with institutional and imperial power. With his work on margins and postcolonialism, this displaced scholar does not only change the margins but also constructs enough fault lines to create a seismic shift to, in a real sense, relocate the field. For example, going back to an adjective that I quoted in the beginning of this essay to describe him, this ‘ubiquitous Sugirtharajah’ (Moore 2000: 185) shows that it is not only legitimate but also helpful for a biblical/theological scholar to be in multiple places, locations, or fields at the same time. Like the tension between margin and diaspora or between area studies and ethnic studies that I have tried to address in this introductory essay, the tension between disciplinary specificity and transdisciplinary sympathy

keeps Sugirtharajah shuttling back and forth between biblical and theological studies as well as between biblical/theological studies and the larger world of postcolonial/cultural studies.

Organizing the Volume

Instead of taking time and space to summarize the arguments of the contributions to follow, let me simply give a description and an explanation of how the volume is organized. My organization of the volume is admittedly arbitrary, though I hope there is a kind of idiosyncratic logic to it. Thinking that readers are likely to be longing for a change after my somewhat out-of-place introductory essay for what is supposed to be a volume within biblical/theological studies, I have placed essays that actually perform a reading of specific biblical passages first, under the heading of 'Interpretive Interventions'. Essays in this section actually engage many of the topics and issues that I have touched on in this introduction: power differential in terms of gender and/or race/ethnicity (Kuan and Tran; Mbuwayesango; Clark and Ringe; Moore); power of the state (Moore; Gossai; Boer); material or socio-economic realities, particularly that of slavery (Boer; Schüssler Fiorenza); and the tension between community and diversity (Schüssler Fiorenza; and Fernandez). To highlight the collaborative nature and force of much of Sugirtharajah's scholarship, I have also chosen to put at or near the beginning two co-authored essays that seek to re-read two 'liminal' female characters who have been the foci of much postcolonial biblical criticism: Rahab of the Hebrew Bible (Kuan and Tran) and the Samaritan woman of the Christian Testament (Clark and Ringe).

Fernandez's contribution performs a hinge function within this section. On the one hand, there is a link between Schüssler Fiorenza's reading of the church caught in the tension between freedom and slavery and Fernandez's reading of the church as a stranger in diaspora. On the other hand, the figure of 'stranger'—which I have already introduced earlier by way of Park—plays a key role in both Fernandez's construction of the church community and Wimbush's reading of 'the making of the African-ized Bible'. A notable shift also occurs around Fernandez's essay within the section: there is a move from reading a community (Schüssler Fiorenza; Fernandez) to reading how a community reads and makes meaning of (biblical) text and life (Wimbush; Sebastian; Staley). Along with the contribution by Kuan and Tran, the last four essays of this first section also demonstrate the importance of ethnic and area studies—and hence both diaspora and margin—in postcolonial criticism, as they deal respectively with the current massive global migration of people (Fernandez), the 'Middle Passage' of African slaves (Wimbush), a contemporary Dalit Christian community in India (Sebastian), and a cross-country fund-raising tour of a Californian

orphanage run by white women for Chinese children in the first decade of the twentieth century (Staley).

The next section, 'Evaluative Interventions', contains five essays that seek to review and evaluate postcolonial criticism in general (West; Punt; Broadbent) and/or the scholarship of Sugirtharajah in particular (West; Segovia; Smith-Christopher). I must make two clarifications to avoid misunderstandings of my previous statement. First, that sentence does not in any way imply that essays in the preceding section engage in practices of interpretation without evaluation. A glimpse back at the topics and issues I listed earlier will reveal that these essays point to the need to evaluate, just to give a couple of more obvious examples, the interlocking dynamics between colonialism and sexism, or the tendency for postcolonial studies to dismiss Marxism or the material causes/effects of ideas. What helps to distinguish the essays in the second section is that, unlike those in the first, they do not engage directly with passages within the Bible.

My second clarification is that, despite the term 'in general', these evaluations of postcolonialism are actually rather particular, just as the evaluation of Sugirtharajah within this section are also more specific than the words 'in particular' convey—West bases his evaluation on the reception of Sugirtharajah's work in South Africa; Segovia on the three editions of *Voices*, and Smith-Christopher on a seminar that he taught. In contrast to or maybe because of the dense academic abstraction that postcolonial theory has often been criticized for (e.g. Sugirtharajah 2008: 14), the three essays that review postcolonial biblical criticism are all specifically grounded and historically contextualized in a geographical region. While West and Punt both do so in reference to South African biblical scholarship and thus provide a provocative conversation with each other within the volume, Broadbent situates his retrospective and prospective look at postcolonialism within the context of European biblical/theological scholarship. It is significant to point out that most of these evaluative essays manage to, as I have tried to do with margin and diaspora, honor Sugirtharajah by taking him seriously enough to push back at him.

A third section, 'Emergent Interventions', ends the volume. What is 'emergent' in scholarship—particularly biblical/theological scholarship—is unfortunately late at times, lagging behind social movements that push different issues and agendas forward. This belatedness, however, does not in my view automatically render its politics ineffective. In like manner, this section in no way dismisses the significance of essays that seek to remind postcolonial critics of the need to return to what may be considered 'outdated' (like Marxist materialism) or remember what may be considered simply 'dated' (like feminism). Having said that, the three essays included in this final section do deal with two topics that have not had a long tradition within biblical studies, especially in its western threads; namely, pluralistic

reading and use of scriptures (Phan) and ecological criticism (Wainwright; Rivera). They also in some way respond to Broadbent's call to steer postcolonial hermeneutics toward not only multi-faith realities but also into theology in general and Christian church history or Christian church doctrine in particular.

The time of globalization and diasporas must not blind us from the fact that even or especially as people and texts of various religious traditions are coming into more and closer contacts, some religious traditions have claimed dominance while others remained marginalized. Echoing the emphasis on the multi-religious context of Asia we first read in Kuan and Tran as well as conversing indirectly with the query posed by Smith-Christopher within this volume, Phan seeks to argue for the why and how of 'reading sacred texts interreligiously'. The time of globalization and diasporas should also alert us to the thought that people migration across the globe is not only a form of 'writing on the earth' (Dufoix 2008: 37), but also—partly if not primarily under the command of the capitalist economy and machinery—a masculinist colonization of the material earth (see also Nixon 2005). Each in her own way, Wainwright and Rivera help us see not only how ecological issues may surface surprisingly in familiar stories of the Bible (Jesus' genealogy and birth story in Matthew and Moses and the burning bush in Exodus, respectively) for those who have lenses to see but also how ecological criticism can work well with postcolonial studies. Rivera's contribution provides a nice ending to not only this section but also the entire volume, as her argument for 'elemental bonds' includes a strand on divine multiplicity that connects with the multireligious sensitivity in Phan as well as in Kuan and Tran.

Questions of section divisions and organization aside, all the essays in this volume are in conversation with and/or indebted to the interventions of Sugirtharajah's work on margin, postcolonialism, and diaspora. His interpretive practice is a creative and political one that interrupts, informs, and fashions the Bible and theology in brave new ways. For Sugirtharajah's pioneering scholarship and collegial spirit, I think I may speak for all of the contributors to this volume that we owe him a great debt of gratitude.

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Part I

INTERPRETIVE INTERVENTIONS

READING RACE READING RAHAB:
A 'BROAD' ASIAN AMERICAN READING OF A 'BROAD' OTHER

Kah-Jin Jeffrey Kuan and Mai-Anh Le Tran

In the introduction to his edited volume, *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, Vincent Wimbush asks poignantly, 'How might putting African Americans at the center of the study of the Bible affect the study of the Bible?' (2000: 2). Indeed, similar questions may be raised by other racial-ethnic minority groups attempting to find or locate their place within the arena of biblical interpretation. In seeking to answer the question, Wimbush goes on to critique biblical exegesis, which, to a greater extent, is based on philology, for its dishonest claim of objectivity in the engagement of texts. Two strategies related to philology are particularly troubling for him: (1) the notion of space as timeless and confined to the past; and (2) the power of interpretation of the constructed past denied to many who are non-specialists. Such philological study of the Bible has led to the 'whitening, viz. the Europeanization and Euro-Americanization, of the Bible, an example of western cultural domestication and containment' (Wimbush 2000: 10). Thus, when Wimbush suggests 'foregrounding African American experience for the study of the Bible', it is meant as 'a challenge to the still largely unacknowledged interested, invested, racialized, culture- and ethnic-specific practice of biblical interpretation that is part of an even larger pattern of such interpretation of literatures and of history in the West' (2000: 8).

The foregrounding of issues of race and ethnicity for the study of the Bible is a mode of reading that racial-ethnic minority scholars have been pushing for in North America since the 1990s. This mode of reading, by locating issues of race and ethnicity at the center, is equally about the quest for meaning, about making meaning in the process of reading and interpretation. As Wimbush notes, such a study of the Bible begins 'from a *different site of interpretation and enunciation*, with the necessarily correlative *different presuppositions, orientations and agenda*' (2000: 9). Clearly, such a mode of reading is focused on the present realities and experiences of the readers, not on the past of the text. Moreover, it does not claim neutrality, objectivity, or universality in the meaning constructed in the reading of the text. More and more, racial-ethnic minority scholars are advocating that the

study of the Bible foregrounded in the experiences of racial/ethnic minority communities needs to engage the field of ethnic studies, be it African American studies, Asian American studies, or Chicano/Latino studies (see in particular, Segovia 1995; Liew 2002). Tat-siong Benny Liew clearly made such an appeal in his introductory essay to the anthology *The Bible in Asian America*, which uses Asian American experiences as an interpretive lens in the reading of the Bible (2002: 2-4). In fact, scholars like Wimbush and Liew and a growing number of racial-ethnic minority biblical scholars who engage in such a reading strategy see their work as a form of ethnic studies. Wimbush suggests that a focus on African American religious experience in the reading of the Bible will 'likely to have a powerful impact upon the shape of African American studies' (2000: 20). Among Asian Americans, conversations have been going on in the last few years between Asian Americans in biblical studies and their counterparts in Asian American studies through the 'Asian Pacific Americans and Religion Research Initiative'. In fact, what Liew calls for is not just a matter of bridging biblical studies and Asian American studies, for he is concerned that the 'bridging' language of interdisciplinarity is too soft and benign. Rather, he advocates for 'transdisciplinarity', which represents for him 'a dynamic explosion in the sense of a transgression and a transformation' (2002: 4). While it is yet to be determined what could result from transgressing disciplinarity, signs of mutual impact resulting from robust engagement across disciplines are becoming more visible (e.g. Iwamura 2002).¹

As Asian American scholars, we locate ourselves within the community of readers who read the Bible through the interpretive lens of race and ethnicity as they intersect with other dimensions of subjectivity—specifically, gender, sexuality, and colonial history. Our reading strategies are much influenced by scholars who thrive and interpret in the borderlands and on the borderline, such as R.S. Sugirtharajah, Archie Lee, and Musa Dube. In a 1990 essay, Sugirtharajah proposes using a dialogical approach in the engagement of biblical texts. He defines his dialogical approach as one 'which acknowledges the validity of the varied and diverse religious experiences of all people and rules out any exclusive claim to truth by one religious tradition' (Sugirtharajah 1990: 13). Similarly, Lee also proposes a strategy which he refers to as 'cross-textual hermeneutics'. Although trained in the *Wissenschaft*, both Sugirtharajah and Lee became dissatisfied with a *wissenschaftlich* mode of interpretation as well as other more literary modes of reading, particularly in relation to the multi-religious context of Asia, and have become harsh critics of these modes of reading of biblical texts. Lee, for example, notes that these modes of interpretation have not only left out 'the socio-political experiences of injustice, suffering,

1. Iwamura is trained in the field of rhetoric and that of Asian American studies.

exploitation and poverty in Asia' (Lee 1993: 35), but also ignored 'the existence of other sacred scriptures by which Asian peoples have been continuously nourished and nurtured and on which Asian spirituality and religiosity have been largely dependent' (Lee 1993: 37). Hence, Lee argues that Asian Christians hold two identities in a creative tension—a cultural identity as Asian and a religious identity as Christian—and exist in two worlds—the world of the Bible and Christian faith and the world of Asian scriptures, cultures, and religions. Asian Christians, therefore, operate with two 'texts', literary and non-literary. These two texts ought to be brought into interaction and interpenetration with one another. In proposing such an approach, Sugirtharajah and Lee challenge Asian biblical interpreters to take seriously and to bring into conversation their Asian textual and cultural traditions with the biblical texts.

In addition, Sugirtharajah advocates to supplement a postcolonial lens to such dialogical/cross-textual readings. The task here includes challenging narratives or interpretations that legitimize colonial interests as well as engaging in 'emancipatory reading' of the texts by exposing 'colonial codes' which underscore colonial ideologies. A postcolonial reading would look for 'oppositional or protest voices'. It does not romanticize or idealize the poor or oppressed; it does not blame the victims, but rather scrutinize evil at a systemic level. It engages in an intertextual study of the sacred texts and the histories of the Christian faith and other faiths to discover 'how these diverse texts can help us account for our collective identities' (Sugirtharajah 1998: 20-23). Ultimately, however, postcolonial readings must stay connected with the present realities of the common people and address the questions that affect their daily lives, lest they too would become colonialist, oppressive, 'incomprehensible and inaccessible' to the people they intended to help (Sugirtharajah 1998: 24; see also Sugirtharajah 2001: 244-59). This kind of postcolonial reading has profound implications when we approach a text from the perspective of race and ethnicity, since the construction of race and ethnicity of minority groups often is done by the dominant culture and colonial power. A postcolonial lens can indeed bring to the text an oppositional and protest voice in terms of race/ethnicity.

A postcolonial dialogical/cross-textual hermeneutics that takes seriously the issues of race and ethnicity as interpretive lenses cannot afford to ignore the issue of gender. Musa Dube, among others, has articulated forcefully that women from the Two-Thirds World face a 'double colonization' of patriarchy and Western imperialism (2000: 113). As such, they are caught in a crossfire between their male counterparts, who insist on the priority of anti-imperialism, and their white feminist sisters, who contend that patriarchy remains the foundational form of oppression. Envisioning new discursive spaces where the distinct yet intertwining oppressive structures of patriarchy and imperialism are challenged, Dube poses two

questions: (1) '[G]iven the role of the Bible in facilitating imperialism, how should we read the Bible as postcolonial subjects?' (2000: 4); and (2) '[H]ow can postcolonial subjects read the Bible without perpetuating what [is] recognize[d] as a self-serving paradigm of constructing one group as superior to another?' (2000: 15). Dube writes of the new reading strategies for the interstitially positioned postcolonial subject:

[C]olonized writers-readers have embarked on intertextual wars of decolonization by adopting a subversive hybrid approach. They weave cross-cultural discourse, drawing from the cultural banks of both the colonized and the colonizer. This subversive hybrid approach rejects the privileging of imperial texts and institutions as the standard for all cultures at all times, for such prioritizing characterizes imperialist ideology of claiming superiority in order to suppress differences (2000: 115-16).

More importantly, this 'feminist postcolonial dialogical/cross-textual' hermeneutical approach refuses to subsume under decolonizing agendas the vigilant examination of gender constructs, gender representations, and genderized constructions of power and subordination. For that matter, when we reckon with multiple dimensions of subjectivity in addition to race, ethnicity, and gender (e.g. class, caste, language, occupation, education, etc.), any form of 'double colonization' suddenly explodes in ambiguity and complexity, yielding broad implications for biblical interpretation.

We follow alongside the steps of this formidable community of interpreters to make in this discursive space an attempt 'to read culture to read text', an approach that is appropriate for Asian American biblical hermeneutics. Like our Asian counterparts, Asian American biblical interpreters operate with multiple texts: the Bible of our religious heritage, other religious traditions that have shaped us, and our racial/ethnic and cultural identities as Asian Americans. As hybrid subjects who negotiate our existence in postcolonial contexts, we are constantly engaged in the process of deconstructing and reconstructing issues of race/ethnicity and gender in relation to the politics of identity. As identity negotiations fluctuate with shifting boundaries and spaces, the *locus of interpretation* for us also becomes fluid and indeterminate, necessitating frequent re-orientation for validity and relevance. Despite such uneven topography, one can always identify some coordinates with which to draw some tentative intersecting axes for the interpretative act. We identify here four tropes (or sets of tropes), informed by the Asian American experiences, as coordinates for a *broad* 'feminist postcolonial dialogical/cross-textual' reading of a rather famous 'broad' in the biblical text, Rahab (*rāhāb* in Hebrew, meaning 'wide' or 'broad', which, in English, also connotes a sexually promiscuous woman): (1) hybridity and liminality; (2) yellow peril/perpetual foreigner; (3) model minority; and (4) sexualized other. As we will discuss, against the backdrop of what is very much a war epic, we find this peculiar story about a racialized Canaanite, a sexualized

prostitute, a female trickster, a figurative 'broad' whose city, home, and physical body were 'entered'. Is she a traitor or heroine, foreigner or model 'naturalized' citizen? It all depends on how we position the subject, and on our own subject positions as readers.

The Story of Rahab

The familiar story of Rahab is set within the drama of the Israelite conquest of Canaan, against a backdrop of war and violence. In the unfolding saga, we read that the first place the Israelites will take possession east of the Jordan River is Jericho. Joshua sends two spies on a reconnaissance assignment. Without even mentioning that they actually carry out their assigned task, the story tells us almost immediately that they end up in the house of a prostitute by the name of Rahab and spend the night there. The king of Jericho, presumably with spies of his own, soon discovers the presence of suspicious elements in their midst. The king sends orders to Rahab to hand over the men. Rahab draws on her profession as a protective cover, for a prostitute is not expected to know where her clients come from and where they would go after the sexual encounter. Having hidden the Israelite spies on the rooftop, Rahab sends the king's messengers off on a wild goose chase.

As soon as it is safe, Rahab goes up to the roof to encounter the spies. She launches out into an eloquent confession of faith in the Israelite deity, a confession steeply rooted in the Deuteronomistic traditions and language. It is she who volunteers the information that the spies have come to look for. She tells them: 'I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you' (Josh. 2.9). She confesses that 'the LORD your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below' (2.11). As a quid pro quo, she now exacts a covenantal promise from the spies, saying, 'Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the LORD that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. Give me a sign of good faith that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death' (2.12-13). Her request suggests that she has knowledge of the *herem* imposed on all the Canaanites whereby the Israelites are to 'utterly destroy' them (Deut. 7.2). Rahab boldly asks that she and her family be exempted from the *herem*. Interestingly, the spies agree to the request, which is a clear violation of the prohibition to make treaties with the inhabitants of the land (Deut. 7.2). They seal the covenantal promise with an oath, 'Our life for yours!' (Josh. 2.14).

Next comes the action-packed rope-climbing sequence and the symbolic crimson cord which hangs as a sign of a human pact, by which apparently even God is bound. The spies return to tell Joshua about their experience. Confidently, they report what the prostitute told them: '[A]ll the inhabitants

of the land melt in fear before us' (Josh. 2.26). This coming from two guys who had just climbed out of a window in fear for their lives?! Nevertheless, the 'intelligence' is thus gathered; a theophanic encounter affirms divine sanction. Liturgical fanfare brings us to the story's climax: the enemy's city is triumphantly and justifiably entered and dispossessed, with the help of the collaborator Rahab.

Hybridity and Liminality

It has been said that Asian Americans are cultural hybrids. While we would be hard pressed to find any group of people who are culturally 'pure-bred', perhaps what is meant by such a statement is that the hybrid identity of Asian Americans as a racial/ethnic minority group in the North American context—as with other racial/ethnic minority groups—is intensified by a disconcerting sense of liminality in which we are often located in the interstices of multiple and allegedly competing 'worlds': the 'homeland' of our ancestors in one of the Asian countries and our present 'new world' in the United States (or North America). The 'homeland', of course, remains in ever elusive distance, reified in the imagination of those in the new world, and to which Asian Americans are expected to reconnect.

Commenting on the introjection of Asians in (North) America, Gary Okihiro notes, '[t]he "when and where" of the Asian American experience can be found within the European imagination and construction of Asians and Asia and within their expansion eastward and westward to Asia for conquest and trade' (2000: 133). Asia, being Europe's exoticized and feminized 'Other', justified its colonization. On the one hand, it was a source of riches, civilization, and languages; on the other hand, it legitimated Western pattern of authority and domination. Thus, the entry of Asians into (North) America, and the construction of the Asian American racial/ethnic identity, has always been contingent upon (North) American politics and economics.

It is within this matrix of racialization that Asian American racial/ethnic and cultural identities are constructed and reconstructed. Our identity is said to be hyphenated, each aspect contributing significantly to the construction of who we are. We are *both* Asians *and* Americans, yet never fully Asians nor Americans. David Palumbo-Liu's analysis of Asian American literature reveals a 'formula' by which the universal 'ethnic dilemma' of 'dual personality' is allegedly to be 'healed' by way of 'introspective meditation' or 'inward adjustment', sociopolitical critique conveniently glided over (1999: 397). Thus, whether the 'dual cultural personality' is critically embraced or internally pathologized, the hybrid identity both enables and necessitates Asian Americans to negotiate from one world to another, because in a sense we live in different worlds and occupy different spaces—both physical and

figurative—at the same time. Such an identity allows and requires Asian American subjects to cross cultures, albeit some more easily than others. Given the generational struggles and the psychological stresses typically experienced by cultural border-crossers, especially the ‘minoritized’, negotiation between multiple worlds carries with it its own set of challenges. What is easy for some may not be so for others. For example, those with multiple and ‘better’ linguistic skills tend to negotiate cultural border-crossings more effortlessly than others. Our hybridity puts us in a position to be an interpreter of each of the different worlds we move in and out of on a daily basis. In a world that has become multicultural, hybrid subjects somehow gain an advantage over those who insist that they can exist within static, self-contained cultural bubbles.

A hybrid racial/ethnic and cultural identity thrusts Asian Americans into a state of ‘in-betweenness’. Fumitaka Matsuoka describes it as follows:

It is at once the world of isolation and intimacy, desolation and creativity. A person in a liminal world is poised in uncertainty and ambiguity between two or more social constructs, reflecting in the soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions. One of the constructs is likely to be dominant, whether cultural or linguistic. Within such a dominant construct one strives to belong and yet finds oneself to be a peripheral member, forced to remain in the world of in-betweenness (1995: 54).

Living in a liminal space is living in a world of in-betweenness. In such a space, one experiences moments of acceptance and rejection, at times as insiders and other times as outsiders, and of danger and protection.

In multiple ways, the character Rahab comes before us as a hybrid subject. She lives in a liminal space, a world of in-betweenness, between the Canaanite world of her origin and the Israelite world she is about to enter. She possesses the knowledge and the *modus operandi* of her Canaanite world. With that knowledge, she is able to outsmart her king and her people. She seems to have foreknowledge that the king will come to seize the Israelite reconnoiters. Hence, she has already hidden them on the roof before the king’s messengers come looking for them. She instinctively draws on the distinctive characteristic of her profession—only to offer sexual favors and not expected to know where her clients come from and where they go after the sex—to deceive the messengers. Additionally, Rahab understands the Israelite world even before she lives in that world. She knows the Israelite deity and calls the deity by name, Yahweh. She confesses faith in Yahweh as the sovereign. She is aware that Yahweh has given the land to the Israelites. She has heard how Yahweh dried up the water of the Red Sea before the Israelites when they came out of Egypt, and what Yahweh did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan. She has knowledge of the *herem* imposed on the Canaanites. She even has the wherewithal to exact a covenant from the spies for the safety of herself and her family.

Rahab's hybrid identity is also indicated by where her house is physically located. We are told that 'her house was on the outer side of the city wall and she resided within the wall itself' (Josh. 2.15). In fact, the sentence can be better translated as 'her house was in the city wall and she lived in the wall'. This is a reference to the particular defensive fortifications that were common in many cities in biblical times. These fortifications consisted of casemate walls, which are double cross-walls built to create chambers that were either filled with rubble for strengthening or partitioned off as living quarters. It is in one of these living quarters that Rahab lives. The location of her house situates her physically in an in-between space, between the inside and the outside. Daniel Hawk captures this well when he says, 'The city wall itself is a boundary between Israel and others and the site of transformations. When the spies come to Canaan they enter this in-between place' (2000: 47). In this in-between space, Rahab's hybridized identity is shaped. Yet, this is a space fraught with ambiguity. The inside and the outside are permeable through this space. Moreover, it is not always certain who constitute the insiders and the outsiders. In the story, the insider and outsider positions shift. The insider Canaanites will be rendered outsiders, and the outsider Israelites will become the insiders. As a hybrid person, Rahab crosses and negotiates her way in both worlds. Indeed, she experiences at times danger and at other times protection. Likewise, Asian Americans live within such a liminal space, a space where the categories of insider and outside are at best ambiguous and ultimately a matter of the politics of identity and the politics of positioning.

Perpetual Foreigner

Frank Wu in his prize winning volume entitled *Yellow: Race in American beyond Black and White* writes, "'Where are you from?'" is a question I like answering. "'Where are you *really* from?'" is a question I *really* hate answering' (2002: 79). This is a sentiment shared widely by Asian Americans, whether or not they are first generation or fourth generation. In fact, in the experience of many Asian Americans, the adverb *really* is more often than not already imbedded in the question 'Where are you from?' Particularly for second or later generation Asian Americans, if they pretend to be ignorant of what the questioner is asking, and respond by saying something like 'I am from Berkeley, California' or 'St. Louis, Missouri', the non-obvious *really* will soon become obvious. Such questions, primarily from the dominant white society, in many ways define the Asian American experience. Wu notes: 'More than anything else that unites us, everyone with an Asian face who lives in America is afflicted by the perpetual foreigner syndrome. We are figuratively and even literally returned to Asia and ejected from America' (2002: 79). Such questions, intended or not, seek to inscribe

Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners and say to us that we cannot be real Americans. We are viewed as and related to as an 'other'. The dominant culture says to us that we are not one of 'us', but one of 'them'. Implicit too is the message that the United States cannot be 'our homeland', no matter how many generations our families have been here. The attempt is to return us to 'where we are *really* from'.

Discourses pertaining to Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners oscillate between the tropes of 'yellow peril' and 'model minority'. The 'yellow peril' ideology was at its peak in the 1920s and 1930s, with shifting meaning as it referred to different Asian groups, indicating that '[t]he fear of racial otherness was not a mere abstraction, but connected to specific material histories' (Palumbo-Liu 1999: 35). Palumbo-Liu delineates the fears behind the different designations of 'yellow peril' as follows: associated with the Chinese, it suggested a fear of the 'mass'; with the Japanese, a fear of military and technological successes; with South Asians, a disdain for their 'Hindoo' lifestyles and Anglicized mannerism; with Filipinos, a fear of hybridized blood and demonization of Asian sexuality (1999: 35-40).²

The story of Rahab begins by inscribing her as an insider in her own land who will soon become a foreigner and an outsider to the Israelites. In fact, as Frank Spina notes, 'It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Rahab is the quintessential outsider in the whole book of Joshua' (2005: 54). Indeed, Rahab, as a woman, a prostitute, and a Canaanite is the ultimate 'Other' (Rowlett 1992: 15-23). While it is true that Rahab eventuates to becoming an 'insider' to the Israelites as a result of her act of betrayal of her own people,³ the reality is that Rahab is inscribed as 'a perpetual foreigner'. Ironically, after the conquest of Jericho, she becomes a 'foreigner' in her own land.

The story of Rahab in Joshua ends with a note that 'her family has lived in Israel ever since' (6.25). It implies the inclusion of Rahab and her family within the fold of the Israelites. According to ancient Jewish legends, Rahab converts to Judaism, marries Joshua, and becomes the ancestress of prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Rahab's confession of faith in the Israelite deity engenders her turn from being an Israelite 'outsider' to an 'insider'. She names the Israelite deity as Yahweh without being told. She affirms the

2. In that era, Koreans were still colonized subjects of Japan, and therefore were treated as Japanese. Southeast Asians were not yet around for comparison.

3. Dube describes Rahab as a betrayer of her own people and a collaborator with the enemy. She argues that since Rahab is a sex worker, she thus 'bears porous boundaries' and 'owes no allegiance to any man, save the one who is ready to pay for her services' (2003: 70). Allowing the enemies to enter through her, the entire city and all the land eventually falls to the Israelites.

sovereignty of Yahweh, 'the LORD your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below' (Josh. 2.11). She knows what Yahweh has done for the Israelites. She even knows the *herem* of total annihilation of the Canaanites, indeed insider knowledge, that has been commanded of the Israelites. Hence, Carolyn Pressler suggests that 'Rahab serves as a reminder that Israelite identity is defined by faith, not ethnicity' (2002: 25). Thus, she becomes an Israelite. Yet, her identity as an Israelite remains at best unstable. Her faith does not make her entirely an 'insider'. She remains a 'Canaanite Israelite', an 'other', a 'perpetual foreigner', and one could suspect a suspicious presence in the gaze of many Israelites. If she sold out her own people, might she one day sell us out?!

After introducing her as the prostitute whose house the spies go to, the story in chapter 6 refers to her twice as 'Rahab the prostitute' (6.17, 25) and once as just 'the prostitute' (6.22). Such a reference may be used to indicate her origin, yet, it seeks to reinforce her as the 'other'. As we have mentioned, her name *rāḥāb* in Hebrew means 'wide' or 'broad'. While some scholars suggest that the name is chosen to indicate the 'good and broad' (*rēḥābā*) land, a land flowing with milk and honey' that God is giving to the Israelites, others, however, suggest that the name is more akin to the English slang 'broad' when used in reference to a woman who is sexually experienced and has a notorious reputation (Pressler 2002: 23; Spina 2005: 55). In addition, her profession as a prostitute (*zōnā*), while not outlawed in ancient times, renders her an outcast. She is 'a tolerated but dishonored member of society' (Bird 1997: 199). In the biblical traditions, prostitution is not only frowned upon and scorned, but it is also often associated with going after foreign gods. Exod. 34.15-16, for example, notes: 'You shall not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to their gods, someone among them will invite you, and you will eat of the sacrifice. And you will take wives from among their daughters for your sons, and their daughters who prostitute themselves to their gods will make your sons also prostitute themselves to their gods'. The term 'to prostitute' (*zānā*) is used in this context to signify 'othering' and associated with 'foreigners', particularly the Canaanites. Hence, to prostitute oneself to other gods is to make oneself an 'other', an 'outsider'. The reference to 'Rahab the prostitute' therefore conjures up notions of being the perpetual 'other', the 'perpetual foreigner'. In essence, the reference might as well have been 'Rahab the Canaanite'.

Rahab's status as a perpetual foreigner, finally, is reinforced in Josh. 6.23. The text reads, 'So the young men who had been spies went in and brought Rahab out, along with her father, her mother, her brothers, and all who belonged to her—they brought all her kindred out—and set them outside the camp of Israel'. The term 'outside the camp' is used many times in the Pentateuch. First, it is the locus where the remains of the animal of a

sin offering—the skin, the flesh, and the dung—are burnt (Exod. 29.14; Lev. 4.11-12, 21; 8.17; 9.11; 16.27). Second, ‘outside the camp’ is the place where people deemed unclean are to live, temporarily or permanently. These include people with skin diseases, who have a discharge, either menstruation or nocturnal emission, and who have come in contact with corpses (Lev. 13.46; Num. 5.2-4; 31.19; Deut. 23.10-12). Third, the phrase denotes the location where a blasphemer or a violator of the Sabbath is to be taken and stoned to death (Lev. 24.14, 23). Clearly, ‘outside the camp’ designates a place that is not desirable, a place where contaminants are dealt with or eliminated. Thus, the place ‘outside the camp’, where the Israelite spies put her and her family after she saves their lives and helps in the destruction of her own people, not only reduces Rahab as a contaminant but also solidifies her outsider status and reinforces her identity as a ‘perpetual foreigner’. There is a sense that the Israelite writer enigmatically insists on her foreigner identity and refuses to grant her any status as an Israelite. To borrow the words of Wu, she is figuratively and literally returned to Canaan and ejected from Israel. As a perpetual foreigner, Rahab the prostitute cannot be a real Israelite. Rahab is therefore literarily reminded of where her home *really* is. That is the reality of ‘Canaanite peril’.

Model Minority

As surely as many Asian Americans have learned how to thrive living in a world of liminality as hybrids, culturally, linguistically, and economically—while often being reminded of our status as the ‘yellow peril’—we are also made to labor under the ‘model minority’ myth, which first emerged in the mid-1960s within mass media’s patronizing appraisal of Japanese and Chinese American successes. Strategically situated in the midst of various liberation movements—particularly the Black Power Movement—the trope reinforced the values of meritocracy and self-sufficiency and ‘proved’ that the United States is already a land of fair and equal opportunity. As far as Frank Wu is concerned, ‘“You Asians are all doing well anyway” summarizes the model minority myth’ (2002: 40), a thesis substantiated by selective empirical evidence of success and a ‘culturally based explanation for achievement’ (Osajima 2000: 451). As a group, Asian Americans are said to be ‘intelligent, gifted in math and science, polite, hard working, family oriented, law abiding, and successfully entrepreneurial’ (2002: 40). Wu notes that this stereotype was perpetuated in the news media, scholarly books, and Hollywood movies. For example, in 1971, *Newsweek* magazine noted that Asian Americans were ‘outwhiting the whites’, while the *Washington Post* ran a headline in 1985 that read, ‘Asian Americans Outperform Others at School and Work’. They are said to have achieved the American Dream. Yet, such a stereotype reflects a disregard for the heterogeneity of

the Asian American people in terms of ethnicity, generation, immigration history, education, linguistic facility, and economic class. It conflates the disparate adaptation trajectories of various categories of Asian immigrants, and does not consider the inter-ethnic tensions that exist among Asian groups. It obscures the fact that the 'yellow peril' image still lurks in the shadow awaiting its cue for re-entrance. Such racialized and homogenizing discourse is a disservice to Asian Americans who struggle to live by the mythic American Dream and earn an 'A' on the 'ethnic report card'.

By fixating on the cultural ethic of hard work, the 'model minority' trope successfully pits racial minority groups against one another, further legitimizing an underclass ideology which blames the apparent failures of minority groups on individual deficiencies (Di Leonardo 1998). Often, the labeling of Asian Americans as the 'model minority' has put Asian Americans in an unenviable position of buffer in the racial tension of a black-and-white paradigm to denigrate other communities of color (Wu 2002: 58). A few years ago, Richard Lamm, a professor at the University of Denver and former governor of Colorado, criticized Hispanics and African Americans for their 'underperformance' and suggested that they should adopt the values of Japanese Americans (2006). Wu observes, 'Whatever the effects are, Asian Americans become pawns. We are not recognized in our own right but advanced for ulterior motives' (2002: 58). In the final analysis, the model minority myth masks the dominant ideology, one that suggests that the society is just and fair and that everyone competes on a level playing field. It covers up the persistent racial discriminations perpetuated by the dominant group and continues to aggravate tensions among racial groups.

It is not a truism to say that Rahab is inscribed as a 'model minority'. She is hailed as a heroine who enables the Israelites to secure the land that God is giving to them. In Christian traditions, she becomes an ancestress of Jesus in Mt. 1.5, and a paragon of faith in Heb. 11.31 and Jas 2.25. In Jewish traditions, she is regarded as 'a model of human redemption' (Mehlman 1992: 193-207). We have mentioned how Jewish legends claim her to be the ancestress of prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Louis Ginzberg further observes that ancient legends at times paint Rahab in dark light in order to accentuate her repentance (Mehlman 1992: 193). Bernard Mehlman adds that '[t]he effort to recast Rahab the harlot into a righteous proselyte, the progenetrix of a distinguished line of prophets, serves as a model for the theme of human redeemability which persists in Rabbinic tradition' (1992: 193). Thus, she is held out as a model to the incoming proselytes.

Characterized as a model minority, Rahab is intelligent and knowledgeable. She outsmarts her own king and fellow Canaanites. She knows what is going on with the Canaanites as well as the Israelites. She reads well the

winds of change in her circumstance. While she may have been a prostitute, she is economically independent. She is resourceful. She knows when to hide the spies and knows what information the spies were gathering. She responds quickly and appropriately when asked about the spies' origin and destination. She is an entrepreneur and a good negotiator. She negotiates well for the safety and survival of her family while understanding the rules of Israelite warfare. Rahab's confession of faith in Yahweh is simultaneously a rejection of her Canaanite gods. She becomes a model for not only non-Israelites but also Israelites, since both groups have a propensity to go after foreign gods.

Yet, holding out Rahab as a model minority is fraught with danger and problems. It ignores the fact that she turns against her fellow Canaanites for her own salvation. It valorizes the self-efficient, self-affirmative actions which a minoritized subject has to take in order to survive—her body and her people in exchange for a chance to live. It perpetuates the notion that the Canaanites are evil and deserve annihilation. In Christian history, this has led to the denigrating and destruction of the cultures and religions of other peoples.

The recycling of these two powerful tropes—'model minority' and 'yellow peril'—must indeed be juxtaposed to underscore the tenuousness of the hybrid subjectivity who is cast as a 'perpetual foreigner'. For as surely as Rahab is made to be a marginalized foreigner, she is also lifted up as a model minority—a Canaanite and a prostitute who can 'out-Israelite' an Israelite (modern translation: an Asian American who can out-white a white American!). One could almost hear the whispers: 'Who does she think she is?!'

Sexualized Other

The gendered translation of the racialized 'yellow peril' and 'model minority' tropes can be found in the prototypical images of the Asian 'Dragon Lady' and 'Lotus Blossom' for Asian American women. As 'Lotus Blossoms', the 'spicy' foreign women are the exotic bearers of culture, the 'buffer' between white privilege and other people of color (Chiang, Cho, Kim, Liu and Zia 1997: 69), and, it could be argued, the contemporary version of the 'Madonna-like image of the white ethnic mother' (e.g. Jewish) who exemplifies a 'perfect' feminine balance between the derogatory stereotypes of so-called 'selfish' WASP and 'lazy' black women (Di Leonardo 1998: 96-97). In contrast, when vilified as 'Dragon Ladies', Asian women as 'perpetual foreigners' further accentuate images of Asian sensuality, prostitution, or devious madams (Tajima 1989: 309), all the while underscoring the so-called inherent moral superiority and purity of women as propounded by the essentialism of 'women's culture' ideology.

Media-popularized stereotypical images such as ‘concubine’, ‘geisha girl’, ‘mail-order bride’, ‘dragon lady’, ‘lotus blossom’, or ‘precious pearl’ solidify the racialized gender representation of Asian women as servile, compliant, self-sacrificing, exotically sensual, masochistic, or ‘desirous of sexual domination’ (Cho 1997: 166; Lu 1997: 17). Voicing an Asian feminist critique of the commodification of ‘cultural traits’ in the prevalent East-meets-West ‘international cosmopolitanism’ of the fashion industry, Lynn Lu writes:

As this ‘Asian invasion’ of a cultural kind belatedly focuses attention on Asian women’s unique difference... it also puts our bodies and images even more squarely in the public domain, makes us readily available to anyone, renders us accessible for any use, while diverting attention from deeper, often harsh realities of our lives. Only the stylish surface of Asianness, and not the realities of Asian experience or existence, are in vogue (1997: 18).

Sanitized celebrations of culture or multiculturalism suppress the material reality of ‘exotic foreign women’ who find themselves to be expendable love partners and cheap laborers in situations of sex trafficking, sexual abuse, racialized sexual harassment, domestic violence, or mail-order marriages.

That Rahab is a sexualized other is clear in the text. She is introduced as a prostitute, one who offers sexual favors for pay. Moreover, her name, *rāhāb*, as mentioned already, has the connotation of one who is a sexually promiscuous woman, a ‘broad’. The spies are instructed to go and view the land. Yet, the first action that the spies take after they have gone to Jericho is to enter the house of a prostitute. Phyllis Bird is right that ‘[t]he language is obviously meant to suggest a brothel, and the following verb, *šākab*, reinforces the suggestion’ (Bird 1997: 210). The term, *wayyiškēbū šammā*, translated as ‘they spent the night there’, is most likely a *double entendre*. In certain contexts, the verb connotes ‘sleeping with someone’ (e.g. 2 Sam. 11.4). The context of the story suggests that the spies are there at the brothel not just to slumber but to seek sexual favors.

The sexual innuendo is even more explicit in Josh. 2.3, when the king’s messengers command Rahab to surrender the spies: ‘Bring out the men who entered you (*habbā’im ’ēlayik*), who entered your house’. Similarly, in Josh. 2.4, Rahab responds by saying that ‘the men indeed entered me’. The Hebrew phrase *bō’ ’el* (‘to go into’) is used to denote sexual intercourse in many contexts (e.g. Gen. 6.4; 16.4; 29.23; 30.4; 38.2, 18; Judg. 15.1; 16.1; 2 Sam. 16.22).

Finally, the crimson cord is perhaps also a sexual allusion, as Spina observes. He notes that in several places in the Old Testament, the color crimson or scarlet is linked to prostitution, promiscuity, or eroticism (Spina 2005: 62). It appears in Genesis 38 (the story of Tamar and Judah), Song 4.3, Jer. 4.30, and Isa. 1.18-21. Thus, Spina suggests that the crimson/scarlet

cord is not an ordinary household item lying in Rahab's house but draped around the window, it represents 'a sign of her profession and indication of the sort of "house" she lived in. In short, Rahab lived in the "red rope district"' (2005: 63).

There is much parallel between the objectification of Asian American women and Rahab as the sexualized other. It is thus no coincidence that Tikva Frymer-Kensky refers to Rahab as 'this biblical Suzie Wong' (cited in Spina 2005: 55). And yet, in the final analysis, the literary irony is stark: the 'broad' is left standing at the site of a city's destruction, with crimson cord prominently draped as a 'trace' of her sexual activity and thus her racialized and sexualized identity. Like the scarlet letter 'A' for Nathaniel Hawthorne's sexualized heroine, Hester Prynne, is the crimson cord hung as a proud sign of salvation in the midst of or in spite of cultural condemnation? If it is salvation, then at what price for this 'hybrid Other'? The entrance into Rahab's house and into her—an act of sexual conquest—reads like a narrative figuration of Israel's subsequent conquest of Canaan. One wonders if this is a victory narrative seeking to justify, glorify, or 'normalize' the destruction of that which must be conquered.

At the story's climax, a mysterious crimson cord is left hanging, a 'brothel' left standing amidst demolished ruins, a group of people (the household of Rahab) left remaining in the face of death, thanks to a woman's 'feminine wiles'. We see 'traces' of both destruction and adaptation, of 'the old' which insists on being figured into the construction of 'the new'. We see hybrid creatures who are both subjects and objects—actors who decide their own fate even as they are being acted upon. We see subjects being repositioned as they reposition themselves in the interest of their survival.

Conclusion

A reading of the story of Rahab from an Asian American cultural and contextual perspective, such as we have done here, ultimately is a cross-reading and a dialogue. It enables us as readers to approach the text not from a distance, but from a particular socio-cultural location and with a racial/ethnic lens marked by ever-fluctuating identity coordinates. With Asian American social experiences as a *locus of interpretation*, we are able to imagine new meanings and new readings of the text, just as the story lures us to the hybrid subjectivity of Rahab. Alongside other approaches which look in this story for the 'oppositional voice' to imperialism or the 'liberative reading' against patriarchy, we have invited readers to consider the ambiguity and complexity of a racialized, minoritized, and sexualized identity who is *simultaneously* either/or, neither/nor, *and* both/and. She can be what you make of her—but for better or for worse? In the final analysis, what meaning we construct out of this text may very well reveal more about us

and how our lives are refigured in the reading. Such is the dialogical and multi-dimensional nature of interpretation. As positioned reading subjects, we are reminded that ultimately, the hermeneutical questions we ask ought to be ones which address the intractable issues of daily living and, especially in an increasingly hybridized world, in interaction with people and negotiating differences. Sugirtharajah's words serve as a reminder of what it means to exist in such a context:

At a time when people are thrown together and live in multilingual, multi-racial, and multi-faith societies, the question is how a people can affirm their language, take pride in their race, be fervent about their faith, cherish their ethnicity, and celebrate their differences and at the same time share the land, its water, and its fruits with others who also make claims about their language, ethnicity, religion, and culture (1998: 24).

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CANAANITE WOMEN AND
ISRAELITE WOMEN IN DEUTERONOMY:
THE INTERSECTION OF SEXISM AND IMPERIALISM

Dora Rudo Mbuwayesango

Two distinct but interrelated contexts—imperial and patriarchal—provide the framework for analyzing how women feature in Moses’ speeches in the book of Deuteronomy. While the imperial context focuses on the context of Israel’s dispossession of the indigenous peoples of Canaan and the domination of neighboring peoples, the patriarchal context focuses on the internal social structure of Israel in the land of promise. The status and visibility of women in each of these contexts are determined by male interests and values.

The book of Deuteronomy purports to present Moses’ farewell discourse to the Israelites just before they enter into the promised land. The book comprises a series of three different speeches. The first speech presents an historical overview of the journey from Horeb to their present location at Beth-peor in the plains of Moab (1.6–4.40). The second speech (4.44–29.1) focuses on the instructions that Moses gave at Horeb, which include the Decalogue (5.6–22) and the Deuteronomic law code (12.1–28.68) that parallels ‘the book of the covenant’ in the book of Exodus 21–23. The third speech stresses—for the present and future generations—the importance of obedience and loyalty to Yhwh and Yhwh’s laws (29.2–32.47).

The speeches of Moses encourage the Israelites to move forward to claim an inhabited land. The basic justification for Israel’s occupation of the land of the Canaanites is its belief in the fulfillment of divine will that was revealed as a promise to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (e.g. Gen. 12.1–9; 13.15–17; 15.5–7, 18–21; 17.2–8; 22.17–18; 24.60; 26.2–4; 28.3–4, 13–15). The book of Deuteronomy is thus an imperial text that provides the legitimation and instructions for Israel’s dispossession of the indigenous peoples of Canaan and for Israel’s future claim to their land. Such imperialism is basically a male game that upholds imperial interests and agenda. There are three groups of women that are simultaneously visible and invisible in the book of Deuteronomy: Israelite women, Canaanite women, and women of far off lands. Moses’ first speech, in particular, illustrates the interlocking dynamics of sexism and imperialism in determining the relative place and role of each group of women.

Women in the Imperial Context

Imperialism is the context and framework for the brief historical overview in Moses' speech. This history serves the purpose of encouraging the Israelites to forge forward in their journey toward the occupation of the land of Canaan, while avoiding the mistakes of the generation that had refused to invade Canaan because of fear. The speech sets forth the imperial interest and agenda of the Israelites. For the most part, Israelite women are completely subsumed into the male identity and interests of Israel. This subsumption is signaled at the beginning of the book itself. The book of Deuteronomy is introduced as 'the words of Moses to *all* Israel (1.1)', that is, men and women poised at the verge of the promised land, ready to fulfill their imperial goal. Moses addresses this group of people with the grammatical masculine 'you'.¹ The feminine gender is subsumed in the masculine gender and the female experience is similarly suppressed. The voice of the speaker, Moses, is male and his addressees are male. Moses begins to tell the past history of this collective Israel: from the making of the covenant at Horeb, through the wilderness journey, to the present location in the plains of Moab (1.6–3.29). But it is very much a male story, as it is based on the promise Yhwh made to Israel's male ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The ultimate realization of this promise was to take place through a military invasion. Israelite women did not have a direct role in military conquests; they were not part of the military structure. This exclusion of Israelite women from military engagement is clearly indicated: these fighters are never referred to in neutral terms but specifically as male. For example, the terms used to refer to the Israelite military force is 'men of war' (*'anšē hammilḥāmā*, 2.14–16). The spies who are sent to scout the land in preparation for invasion are specified as 'men' (1.22). Hence, unlike Canaanite women, Israelite women are not visible as warriors or victims. In the depiction of the defeat of the Israelites in the hill country by the Amorites whom they attempt to invade in disobedience of Yhwh's command, it is evident that the male fighters are the victims. They, unlike the women and children who remain in the camp, are chased *back* to the camp (1.41–45).

This depiction of non-involvement on the part of Israelite women in the invasion of Canaan may be deduced further from Moses' instructions to the Gadites and the Reubenites for their participation in the conquest of the western side of the Jordan, since they have been given the land on the eastern side of the Jordan: 'militarily equipped, you will cross over before

1. Hebrew grammar is characterized by gender and number specificity, and the second-person masculine singular and plural forms are used interchangeably. We can, however, also identify the addressees in the book as male from the context of the narrative.

your brothers, sons of Israel, all sons of valor' (3.18). The Israelite army is thus comprised of capable young males, identified as 'sons'. Women and children of these tribes are left behind to wait for the return of their fighting men: 'only your women and children, and your live stock... shall stay behind in the towns that I have given to you' (3.19). They are spared from further witnessing the brutalities of the Israelite invasion of Canaan, the land west of the Jordan. Although the women of the tribes that will settle beyond the Jordan are not mentioned, it is quite evident that Israelite women are not on the forefront of the fighting armies but only beneficiaries of Israel's invasion of the Canaanites, because the dispossession of the Canaanites will make room for the Israelite women and children to settle. Thus, as Dube points out, '[imperialism] is power of a nation, consisting of men and women, over men and women of distant lands and nations' (2000: 72).

The invisibility of Israelite women in the power structure is evident not only in the military setting but also in their exclusion from the judicial structure. The judicial system, set up at the advice of Jethro in the book of Exodus (Exod. 18) and at Moses' own initiative in the book of Deuteronomy (Deut. 1.10-18), consists only of men. Israelite females are depicted as having no role in the activities that define and move Israel forward to possess the land. There seems to be a deliberate attempt to distance Israelite women from the direct activities that will result in the dispossession of the indigenous peoples of the promised land. Although Israelite women are invisible in the expressions of the imperial ambitions of the nation, they occupy a privileged and protected position vis-à-vis the women of the nations targeted for dispossession.

While Israelite women are not depicted as either perpetrators or victims of war, the indigenous women are made front and centre as both. There seems to be a deliberate attempt to portray non-Israelite armies as consisting of all people, including men, women, and even children. Thus, King Sihon of Hesbon and King Og of Bashan are both depicted as coming out 'against us, he and all his people for battle' (2.32; 3.1). In the same way that women and children are portrayed as members of the fighting forces of the other nations, they are also portrayed as victims and included in the *herem* (2.43; 3.7). Unlike the women of the Israelite tribes of Gad, Reuben, and the half tribe of Manasseh, these indigenous women are made rather visible.

The difference in the portrayal of Israelite and non-Israelite women in the imperial context continues in two passages that provide the instructions on how Israel is to deal with the rest of the indigenous peoples west of the Jordan. The non-Israelite women consist of two distinct groups: women within the areas targeted for dispossession, and those outside the targeted areas. The treatment of the first group is dealt with extensively as part of the introductory portion of Moses' second speech (7.1-26). It is also

presented briefly as part of the Deuteronomic law code, which is the focus of Moses' second speech (20.16-18). The treatment of the second group of non-Israelite women, who are outside of the borders of the promised land, is depicted in the Deuteronomic law code (20.10-15; 21.10-14).

The context for understanding the fate of the indigenous women of Canaan in 7.1-26 and 20.16-18 is Israel's military invasion aimed at fulfilling its imperial goals. According to Israel's understanding, Yhwh, their God who gives them the land of Canaan, demands the total destruction of the Canaanite peoples, prescribed through the *herem*, or 'ban law' (7.1-26). This *herem* or 'ban law' that calls for total annihilation of the indigenous peoples in the land of Canaan contrasts sharply to the treatment of these peoples in the prepossession stage of the conquest in the book of Genesis (e.g. Gen. 34.30). In the earlier narrative, indigenous women and children are spared from death; they are simply treated as part of the booty to be owned. But in the book of Deuteronomy, Canaanite women are targeted for total destruction in the *herem* (Deut. 7.2; 20.16-17). This demand to exterminate the Canaanites has to do with the fact that the continual existence of the Canaanite peoples after Israel's occupation of their land is perceived as a threat to Israel's identity.

The nature of the threat is very striking. The threat is not that the Canaanites will reclaim their land. Rather, the threat is presented in cultural and religious terms: 'You shall annihilate them—the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites—just as Yhwh your God has commanded, so that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods, and you thus sin against Yhwh your God' (20.17-18). The irony here is that the Canaanites whom Yhwh will render militarily powerless in the hands of the Israelites will prove culturally more powerful than the Israelites. While the Israelites can dislodge the Canaanites from their land militarily, the Canaanites have the power to cause Israel to abandon its God religiously. This power of the Canaanites to cause Israelites to abandon Yhwh, as indicated in Deut. 7.1-26, is invested in the Canaanite women.

In ch. 7, the command to utterly destroy the Canaanites is linked to the prohibition of intermarriage. After listing the seven nations that Yhwh will remove to make room for the Israelites, it is emphasized that these are to be utterly destroyed because these are people with whom the Israelite males must not intermingle: 'Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons' (7.3). The way the prohibition is presented shows that women are viewed as beguiling objects capable of altering male religious commitments.

The reason for this prohibition is its possible effect on the *sons* of Israel, the ones whose mandate is to uphold and maintain the status of Israel as God's chosen people. Israelite identity is defined by the worship of one

God, Yhwh. Worship of other gods would result in the loss of Israel's uniqueness. Intermarriage, specifically between Israelite male and Canaanite women, will lead to corruption and loss of this unique identity and status: 'for that would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods' (7.4). This statement implies the competition between the Israelite God and Canaanite gods is played out in relationship to Canaanite women. It can be understood how Canaanite women might influence Israelite men to turn away from the Israelite God, but what is not clear is how Israelite women's marriage to Canaanite men will influence Israelite men to turn away from the Israelite God. If Canaanite women can turn away Israelite men from serving their Israelite God, how come Israelite women seem incapable of turning Canaanite men to the Israelite God? The underlying assumption influencing the vulnerability of Israelite men in this regard is the demonic characterization of the Canaanite peoples in general. Canaanite men and women share the same characteristic that Israel uses to justify why Canaanites do not deserve the land. Canaanites do not deserve to inhabit the land permanently because of their wickedness (9.4-5).

But how are we to understand the role Canaanite women play in this presumed wickedness? The wickedness of the Canaanites appears to be religious, particularly their focus and manner of worship. Not only are the Israelites to exterminate Canaanite men, women, and children, they are to 'break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their *Asherim* [sacred poles that are probably connected to the singular *Asherah*, an important Canaanite goddess], and burn down their idols with fire' (7.2). The many gods and religious symbols of the Canaanites are viewed as a snare that would draw Israelites away from their identity as a people set apart as Yhwh's special possession. The continued benefits from their status as a chosen people depend on their loyalty to Yhwh alone. The prohibition against marriage to Canaanite women seems to be an acknowledgement that Canaanite women are religious leaders in their societies. Thus if they married Israelite men, they would continue their religious practices and influence their husbands and families accordingly.²

The divine demand for the complete annihilation of Canaanite men and women inhabiting the land contrasts with the instruction for the treatment of the other peoples who are not Canaanites but who are deemed to be the enemies of Israel (20.10-15). Those people are identified as inhabitants

2. In many African societies, women had significant religious leadership role in their indigenous religions; this was seen as a threat to the spread of Christianity in Africa during the Western colonial invasion (see Allman, Geiger and Musisi 2002). Andy Smith points to a similar phenomenon for Native Americans and their colonizers (1995). For the complex relationship between women and colonialism, see Chaundhuri and Strobel 1992; and Midgley 1998.

of far off towns. There are two options for dealing with people inhabiting lands outside of the promised land. Imperialism involves not only the displacement of peoples from the desired lands but also the acquisition of the resources of other lands. In this case, one of the resources that the Israelites desire is the labor of these people in lands outside of Canaan. The first option is that if these people surrender voluntarily, 'then all the people in it shall serve you at forced labor' (20.11). The second option comes into play when the people do not surrender to the Israelites. In that case, after a war in which the non-surrendering town is defeated, all the males are to be killed, and the women and children are to be regarded as spoils of war in the same way as livestock (20.14). Women are part of the spoils of war that the Israelites are encouraged to enjoy. The makeup of the Israelite army is all male; hence 20.10-14 describes how these male Israelite warriors are to treat captured women. They are to annihilate all the males who may have claims on the women, thus leaving the women helpless objects to be claimed as spoils of war.

One of the ways in which they are to enjoy these captive women is delineated in 21.10-14. That passage is viewed by some as a positive attempt to protect women from battlefield rape.³ This positive assessment is based in part on how rape is defined by location. Thankfully, a number of scholars aptly see in this law an attempt to condone and legalize rape of powerless women (e.g. Washington 1998: 202-207; Nelson 2002: 208; Pressler 1993: 15). It is evident that this law is not designed to uphold the interests or rights of the woman prisoner of war. Apart from the fact that the woman is captured in a context where she has probably witnessed the violent death of her relatives at the hands of Israelite soldiers, the process that rehabilitates her for sex with the soldier is at best dehumanizing and disempowering. The captured woman picked for possession by an Israelite male is to go through a ritual that denies her actual identity and personhood. The shaving of the head, the paring of nails, and the discarding of a captive garment (21.12) mark her transition from her indigenous community to that of her captors. There is a waiting period of a month in which the woman remains in the man's house before he assumes sexual access to her. The stated purpose of this waiting period is to give the captured woman a chance to mourn her parents (21.13). There seems to be a deliberate attempt to cause her to dismiss the memory of any other persons among her indigenous people who

3. For example, according to Michael Walzer, the passage is a legislation in human history to protect women prisoners of war (1977: 134-35). Alexander Rofé considers the law as a 'humane ruling that reflects a universal concern with limiting soldiers unbridled brutality and demonstrates consideration for the feelings of the captives' (2002: 157), while James A. Diamond considers the law 'an improvement on the laissez-faire attitude toward rape on the battlefield extant in the ancient Near East' (2008: 62).

are significant to her (e.g. a husband). The only connections from her past that she is to acknowledge are her parents. The month of waiting, disguised as a mourning period, may also be a period long enough for a woman's menstrual cycle to be completed, thus assuring the captor's paternity of any offspring from sexual relations with her (Washington 1998: 206). After this prescribed time, she is deemed ready for sexual intercourse and control. He captor may then take the woman as his wife if he is satisfied with her after the intercourse. If he is not satisfied, however, he has the right to discard her but not sell her or treat her as a slave (21.14). Her release, however, comes with no guarantees because, in a patriarchal society in which a woman's marriage to a man brings protection and security, the foreign woman has to find viable ways to take care of herself. This law may also partly explain the connection that the Hebrew Bible makes between prostitution and foreign women.

This law does not only fail to protect women from rape on the battle ground, it also does not give them any rights at all. The interests and rights that are guaranteed are those of the male captor. The male members of the towns outside of the land of Canaan are the only persons who could make it impossible for the Israelite men to exploit their women; unfortunately, they were annihilated in the war against Israel and thus their women are left defenseless. Thus, with the removal or discredit of their male protectors, the women are free for the picking and exploitation by the Israelite male conquerors. This Deuteronomic instruction, therefore, does not ensure the safety of women in wars but gives instructions for the exploitation of foreign women in an orderly manner to exonerate the men for injustices against the women of other nations.

In the imperial context, the representation of women differs according to their connection to Israelite male interests and agenda. The Canaanite women are exterminated because, like their men, they are a potential threat to Israel's claim to the land they want to occupy. Non-Israelite women outside of the land targeted for Israelite occupation are not a potential threat but candidates to be wives with whom male Israelites can sire children. Israelite women are, however, shielded from visibility in the imperial context; they do not play a visible role in the activities designed for the invasion of other peoples.

Women in the Patriarchal Context

In the patriarchal context, the status and visibility of Israelite women are presented in the law codes that Yhwh gives to Israel through Moses. These law codes serve to define Israel's identity. While the Decalogue is presented as the instructions that are essential for Israel's covenant relationship with Yhwh, the Deuteronomic code is introduced as 'the statutes and ordinances

that you must diligently observe in the land that Yhwh, the God of your ancestors [fathers], has given to you to occupy all the days that you live on earth' (12.1). That the observation of these laws was the only way for Israel's successful and permanent occupation of the land is underscored in the conclusion of Moses' second speech (28.1-68). The significance of these laws for Israel's life in its captured land is undeniable. One of the questions concerning both the Decalogue and the Deuteronomic code is how they relate to women. In all the speeches of Moses the addressee is identified with the masculine pronoun 'you'. While Frymer-Kensky argues that women should be seen as present in the masculine 'you' (since they were also required to obey the laws; 1992: 51-52), Brenner rightly challenges this assertion as she raises the question of how a woman is meant to read or hear commandments such as 'you shall not covert your neighbor's wife in Deuteronomy 5.21?' (1994: 255-58). The question of whether or not women are addressed is a question that applies not only to the context of laws but also to all the speeches of Moses in the book of Deuteronomy. For the most part, the whole discourse of Moses is addressed to the generic masculine subject, 'you'. The elevation of masculinity to the universal level results in the marginalization and subjugation of women in the book of Deuteronomy. Even the commandments that appear to apply to both men and women equally, such as that requiring the observation of the Sabbath (5.12-15), show that the primary addressee is the male head of the household whose responsibility is to see that this law is observed. As far as being addressed as the subject of the law, the female is basically subsumed in the generic male. Israel, as depicted in the book of Deuteronomy, is thus a patriarchal society that marginalizes and subjugates women.

This marginalization and subjugation of Israelite women in the context of a patriarchal social system is illustrated well by two sets of marriage laws in Deut. 22.13-30. In these laws, women are not subsumed into the generic male subject but became the sexual objects or properties of men. These laws are significant in that they seem to provide interpretative application for the basic law prohibition of adultery in the Decalogue (Deut. 5.18). These laws make women visible in the patriarchal context but the basis of that visibility is troubling.

The first set of laws are concerned with the case of a new young bride who is accused by her husband of not having been a virgin at marriage (Deut. 22.13-21). This case is considered from two different circumstances. In the first circumstance, the husband is falsely accusing the young woman because he wants to divorce her (22.13-15). The parents of the young woman have to provide proof of their daughter's virginity before marriage to the town's judiciary body that is all male. Although father, mother and daughter go together to the elders, it is the father who speaks to present the evidence. The proof is basically a cloth, and it is generally assumed to

be stained with blood from the woman's first sexual intercourse with her husband who is accusing her of not having been a virgin (22.16-17). Unlike the case of the wife in Numbers 5, where a husband who falsely accuses his wife of adultery does not suffer any penalty, the husband here in Deuteronomy is penalized if his accusation is false.

The first part of the verse (22.18) that depicts the consequences for the man's slander is not clear. According to Frymer-Kensky, it is stating that the man will first be flogged by the elders before being made to pay fifty shekels of silver (1992: 56). What is significant, however, is that the monetary payment is to the father and not the young woman who is slandered. In fact, the outcome for the woman is that her husband will not be allowed to divorce her, although he hates her. The passivity of the daughter and her mother indicates that the case is really between the father and the husband; the daughter—who is slandered and obviously the injured party here—is not afforded voice. The punishment meted out to the slandered husband is apparently intended to satisfy the injured honor of the bride's father.

The second circumstance presents the consequences for a young bride whose virginity cannot be proven (22.20-21). Noteworthy here is the contrast between the treatment of the husband in the first case and that of the young bride in this case. Even if Frymer-Kensky's interpretation—that the husband is first flogged by the elders before the monetary payment—is correct, the punishment does not compare to the dreadful fate the guilty woman suffers. She is stoned to death at the entrance of her father's house by the men of her town. The cause of her fate is presumed to be sexual unfaithfulness while still under the control of her father. This focus on the virginity of a young woman highlights the double standards inherent in patriarchal cultures. If, indeed, the woman had intercourse with another man prior to her marriage, no attempt is made to identify that person and to punish him in a similar manner. Hence, it seems obvious that these laws are designed to promote and protect male entitlements and privileges in the area of sexuality. When these entitlements are denied, even retrospectively, violence against women is applied.

The second set of laws focuses on the definition of adultery (22.22-29). This is done from four different 'angles'. The first (22.22) provides a clear definition of adultery as a man having intercourse with a woman whose sexuality belongs to another man in a very definitive sense. Thus the status of the woman is stated as 'the wife of a husband'. The Hebrew term, *bē'ulā*, used here for 'wife' or 'mistress', is the feminine form of the masculine *ba'al*, 'husband' or 'master'. The phrase *bē'ulat ba'al* establishes the status of the woman as clearly belonging to another man. The status of the woman, then, determines whether or not a sexual encounter is adultery. This fits well into the general biblical definition of adultery 'as the act of extramarital sexual intercourse of or with a married woman. The wife is the adulteress;

the adulterer is the man who has sexual relations with her. A husband who has extramarital sexual relations with an unmarried woman is not considered an adulterer' (Frymer-Kensky 1992: 58). The penalty for a clear case of adultery is death of both the adulterer and the adulteress. Adultery, therefore, involves the violation of the sexual rights of another man. This kind of violation is considered a grave sin that calls for the death penalty for both parties. The application of this severe penalty is rather unequal, however. To apply it to the man, he has to be caught in the act. This condition is not applied to the woman. Rather, as in the case of the guilty bride above, the woman is put to death, even if there are no witnesses.

The remaining laws (22.23-29) present a review of cases in which the status and the circumstance of intercourse vary from the clear case of v. 22. The second (22.23-24) and third (22.25-27) cases deal with situations in which the status of the women is not *bē'ulat ba'al* ('the wife of a husband'), but the woman is identified as *mē'ōrāsā lē'īš* ('engaged/betrothed to a man' (22.23-27). These two cases deal with a situation in which a women's status is in the process of transition. Two circumstances, defined by the location where intercourse took place, determine the role and consequences for the women and men involved in the sexual act. If the act is located in a city (i.e. a populated area), intercourse between a man and an engaged woman is equated to intercourse between a man and a married woman (22.22-24). Both the man and the engaged woman are to be put to death. The man is an adulterer because he had intercourse with a woman who is in transition to belong to another man. The woman is equally guilty of the crime of adultery. Since the location is the city, the assumption is that if she had cried out for help, there would have been people in the city who could hear and rescue her. Mieke Bal points to the ultimate flaw in this kind of thinking: 'Screams can be staged, while the capacity to scream can be eliminated practically (in an isolated location) or psychically (by paralysis)' (1992: 368). Thus, this law ignores the reality of sexual violence as a woman's experience. And this way of establishing the consent of a woman is a refusal 'to recognize that rape can take place in town or in home' (Washington 1998: 210).

If the sexual act takes place in an open country (i.e. unpopulated area), the man is but the woman is not guilty of adultery (22.25-27). The assumption is that even if the woman cried out for help, no one would hear her. So she is given the benefit of the doubt and it is determined that she did not commit 'an offence punishable by death'. Her situation is equated to that of the victim of murder in that she was overpowered by someone stronger than she, so it is only the man who overpowered her who should be executed. In this case, where it is determined that she did not consent to the sexual act, she is protected from death.

Lastly, the case of intercourse involving a woman neither married nor engaged is reviewed (22.28-29). The status of the woman is defined in two

different phrases. The first phrase, *na'ārā bētūlā* ('a virgin'), identifies her as a woman whose sexuality is the property of her father.⁴ Consequently, she is a virgin because the father only has rights of disposal but not to make use of her sexuality himself. The second phrase, *lō' ōrāsā* ('not engaged'), indicates that no man has been specified to have user claims on her sexuality. Because of her status, therefore, a man having sex with her has not committed adultery, since he has not violated the rights of a husband or a husband-in-waiting who would have the usufruct of her sexuality. His crime is that he has only disrespected the father by usurping the father's right to choose a man to be a husband for his daughter. This crime is not considered to be deserving of the death penalty. Part of the paternal rights of a father is to present his daughters as virgins to the men of their choice. The parallel case in Exod. 22.16-17 seems to point to a practice in which virginity is identified as an item of individual purchase apart from the bride-price or dowry.⁵ The man who has intercourse with a virgin without the father's consent must first pay a penalty fee (fifty shekels of silver) before marrying the woman. Similar practice has been validated by marriage systems in other patriarchal societies.⁶

According to the book of Deuteronomy, the inevitable outcome of intercourse with a virgin is marriage. This certainty in outcome contrasts with that presented in Exod. 22.16-17, where the father can refuse to give his daughter in marriage to the man who has dishonored him by usurping his right to the disposal of his daughter's virginity. In the Deuteronomic code, however, the man must not only marry her but also permanently forfeit his right to divorce her. Although the reason given for the prohibition of divorce is that he has violated her, it does not indicate any real concern for the woman because the violation is only viewed in terms of her father's property loss and not of the woman as a person in her own right. In that regard, the situation of the woman is similar to that of the slandered bride. In both cases, the issue is how the woman's virginity belongs to a man, whether the man is her father and/or her husband. Both cases demonstrate conclusively that female sexuality is the property of males. As in the case of the slandered bride, this law does not necessarily serve the interests of the violated woman. In fact, her interests are not considered. She is treated as her father's valuable commodity, and the law functions to ensure that her father is rightly compensated for the damage to his commodity.

4. This case makes the father's role much clearer in that the father is responsible for the protection of the sexuality of a daughter who is still in his household.

5. In Exod. 22.16-17, the father can refuse to give his daughter in marriage to the man who has sex with her and still get the payment for her virginity.

6. For example, among the Shona and Ndebele societies of Zimbabwe, a man who impregnates a woman outside of marriage has to pay 'damage fee' to her male guardian before any negotiations for marriage can take place.

In a patriarchal context, Israelite women are both visible and invisible. Their invisibility is evident in the fact that as subjects in the speeches and laws, they are subsumed in the generic male. Their visibility is demonstrated in how they are objectified in the Deuteronomic law codes, especially in the marriage laws concerned with defining adultery. Although women are visible in these laws, the concern is male interests in and male rights to female sexuality. These laws ultimately normalize males as property owners. Women in general and female sexuality in particular are assumed to be and treated as properties of men.

Conclusion

In an imperial context, Israelite women are largely invisible as either perpetrators or victims of military violence. While non-Israelite women are subsumed in the general population of their societies, they are made visible in Deuteronomy as victims of Israel's imperial violence. Indigenous women within the borders of the land targeted for Israel's possession do not have even a slight chance of survival. Presumably, for the protection of the relationship between Yhwh and Israel, these women must be exterminated together with their men. Women outside the land targeted for Israel's possession are spared the sword but targeted for sexual exploitation.

While in the imperial context the subsumption of Israelite women in the male identity of Israel places them in the position of victors and not victims vis-à-vis the external world, Israelite women are victims of marginalization and exploitation vis-à-vis Israelite men within Israel's own internal and patriarchal context. As objects for male possession, they are in some way not unlike non-Israelite women; their personhood is denied and they are not afforded any rights. But the manner of their acquisition as property differs from the case of their foreign counterparts. For Israelite women, the father has the right to transfer usufruct of the daughter's sexuality to a husband. For non-Israelite women, however, the rights of their fathers are eliminated by the sword, because the women are acquired as spoils of war after all the males who may have had property rights on them have been killed. The status and visibility of women in Moses' speeches function to legitimate imperialism and patriarchy. The interlocking dynamics of patriarchy and imperialism in the book of Deuteronomy demonstrates that they are two sides of the same coin, or different manifestations of an oppressive system.

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INTER-LOCATION AS TEXTUAL TRANS-VERSION: A STUDY IN JOHN 4.1-42

Sathianathan Clarke and Sharon H. Ringe

Mother you used to tell me
When I was born
Your labour was long.
The reason, Mother,
The reason for your long labour:
I, still in your womb, was wondering
Do I want to be born
Do I want to be born at all
In this land...
Mother, this is our land
Flowing with water
Rivers breaking their banks
Lakes brim over
And you, one of the human race
Must shed blood
Struggle and strike
For a palmful of water. (Rokande 1992: 1)

These waters be to us for drink
Divine are they for aid and joy.
May they impart to us health and strength!
You waters who rule over precious things
And have supreme control of men [and women]
We beg you give us healing balm...
Now I have come to seek the waters,
Now we merge, mingling with sap.
Come to me, *Agni*, rich in milk!
Come and endow me with your splendour (cited in Vandana 1989: 196, 201).

The Bible has remained unchanged for centuries, yet biblical interpretation has always involved copious agents, multiple skills, and mixed commitments. The earth too has retained its size, yet the world is increasingly experienced as a shrinking global village. Both are united by intersecting universal markets in commerce and expanding web-based communities in discourse. In the realm of biblical interpretation this has occasioned an unprecedented opportunity to invite each other to contend with our

particular explications of common biblical texts that arise out of differing social, economic, and political commitments from various specific historical and geographical contexts. Often this reaching out, to make sense of unfamiliar historical situations and the contextual truths arising from these settings, produces the capacity for interpretive elasticity. Agents of biblical interpretation (whether individuals or collectives) attain suppleness by persistently stretching out to understand the Word-from-the-world of others. Sometimes such an expansion leads to unexpected occurrences of hermeneutics from mutual infiltration. Thus, what permeates the porosity of interpretive boundaries at times finds sign-allies and motif-cousins that enable forms of migration or cross-fertilization to formulate a Word-for-the-world of self.

This collaborative paper is an outcome of experiencing the reality of and attesting to the hope in capabilities of interpretive elasticity and possibilities for a hermeneutics of infiltration within our shrinking world. As multiple agents, from different geographical locations, and with an assortment of commitments, we cooperatively mine biblical resources for the ongoing vocation of liberated Christian living in our respective worlds. We are also bound by the jointly held conviction that Bible interpretations cannot but be in some organic manner connected with readings from the sub-merged communities in this e-mergent world. The praxis of freedom and liberation that local sub-merged communities long for in their encounter with Bible texts is kept foremost in our hearts and minds as we undertake this exercise. Specific communities accompany us on this hermeneutical process: Sathi has spent decades working with theological reflections of Dalits in India, and Sharon has worked for decades with feminist and Latin American interpretations of the Bible. We shall leave the remainder of our reflection on biblical interpretations after we actually have completed our re-reading of Jn 4.1-42. Now to the task at hand!

On the Move for God and Deliberately on the Edge

Accompanied by his disciples, Jesus is on his way to Galilee from Judea. John notes emphatically, 'But he had to go through Samaria'. The literary context of this passage places Jesus on a journey between Judea (4.3) and Galilee (4.43). Interestingly, Jesus is leaving Judea because of controversies that have to do with water. The Pharisees had wrongly claimed that Jesus was 'baptizing more disciples than John' (4.1). The link between the baptism of water that was offered by John and Jesus' disciples and the baptism of the Spirit that he would soon offer may have motivated the Evangelist's detail-rich introduction to this narrative. Turning his back on the controversies stemming from the politics of water baptism, Jesus now moves onto another site of water. This time it is a well. We are informed

that Jesus was compelled (*edei*) to go to this well in Samaria (4.4), even though another perfectly acceptable route from Judea to Galilee along the Jordan was available to him. The implication of the impersonal passive is that divine necessity brought him to this location of special encounter. Jesus is deliberate about setting the agenda for the working out of God's will near the Samaritan city of Sychar. 'John often uses the words, "it is necessary" (or "he had to") to signify God's plan, as for example in John 3.14. The Evangelist hereby signals us to be alert to the unfolding of God's plan at this unlikely time and place' (West, Amos, Chilongani, Callaway, Clarke, Tsongo, and Plane Te Paa 2008: 15).

The setting of the narrative (4.1-7a) depends on multiple tropes of 'between-ness' or liminality. Samaria is a geographical boundary territory and also a place of hybridity that Jews would normally have avoided, because both the Samaritans and their religious observances were regarded as having been corrupted during the occupation by Assyria (2 Kgs 17). However, Jesus' relationship to that people and territory is ambiguous in this Gospel. Immediately following this passage, the interpretation of Jesus' journey to Galilee suggests that Samaria and not Galilee might be Jesus' 'own country', from which he moves on (4.43-45). Similarly, in 8.48, Jesus responds to the charge that he has a demon and is a Samaritan by denying that he has a demon, but not denying that he is a Samaritan. These puzzling details beg an explanation, but we can only guess that perhaps Samaritans are included in the membership of the Johannine community. Alternatively, the author may be suggesting a parallel between attitudes toward the Samaritans in Palestine and those toward the Johannine community on the part of the surrounding Jewish community from which the author's community was increasingly estranged.

Jesus meets the woman at the edge of the city of Sychar at a well. The location near but not in the city corresponds to the ensuing conversation in which the symbols of water, place of worship, marital status, and food are taken up but then given new meaning by Jesus. Though the disciples will enter the city (4.8), and the woman will go back to the city and bring others out to Jesus (4.28, 39-40), Jesus himself remains geographically on the edge. The author intentionally invokes an historical reference. 'Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well' (4.6). But where exactly was this well? Often we gloss over the fact that this well was 'near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph' (4.5). We will come to this plot of ground after commenting on the well.

Wells were sites central to women's lives. As the principal providers of the water essential for their families' lives, they would have to make several pilgrimages each day to the well or other water-source on which their village relied. The normal times for going to the well would be in the cool of the morning and at day's end, and thus the well would be an important

site of social encounters and mutual support. That this woman finds Jesus at the well at midday, and that she meets a man there, is repeatedly cited by biblical scholars for placing this narrative form-critically in the genre of a 'betrothal narrative' (e.g. Isaac and Rebekah in Genesis 24, and Jacob and Rachel in Genesis 29). This time of midday echoes the liminality of place and culture that marks the narrative, for a betrothal was a boundary time between periods of a woman's social existence, as she began the move from being a daughter to being a wife. This part of the narrative setting, though, is never developed into the rest of the expected story. There is no mention of a further courtship or wedding, and so we remain again in liminal, unresolved space. She is playing a traditional woman's role—but not quite. Perhaps we are being prepared by the author to expect something auspicious from the encounter between this Jewish man and this Samaritan woman: an unlikely but fulfilling relationship that will lead to wholeness. The biblical tradition continues to set up wells as sites of auspicious encounters that lead to realignment of relationships.

Somewhat ignored by Bible commentators is the Gospel writer's insertion that this location chosen by Jesus is linked to the plot of land given to Joseph by his father, Jacob. This could be another deliberate historical marker that prepares the reader to be open to another theme that will play out in the narrative: just as Jacob breaks with convention in handing down the blessing of God to Joseph, who is not his eldest son, so also will the gift of eternal life be handed on to the Samaritans. The reference to Jacob and his son Joseph subtly sets up this dramatic subversion of the common law practice involving the inheritance of blessing. In the kingdom-province, and because of the providence of God, the first can be the last and the last can be the first! Jacob is a classic example or 'the mother' of all reversals when it comes to the convention of handing down God's blessing. First, Jacob himself deceives his elder brother Esau of his birthright through creative and crafty fraud (Genesis 27). Second, Jacob perpetuates this subversion of convention by blessing Joseph ahead of his other older brothers ('The blessings of your father are stronger than the blessings of the eternal mountain, the bounties of the everlasting hills; may they be on the head of Joseph, on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers', Gen. 49: 26). Third, Jacob reaches a generation into the future to sneakily bless Joseph's younger son (Ephraim) over against Joseph's desire to have the elder son (Manasseh) blessed (Genesis 48). It is surely intentional that the Evangelist situated Jesus' revelation as the 'I am' in this social and geographical context. The Samaritans have this blessing ahead of the Jews. God's favor may not rest with those who consider themselves destined for God's blessing.

As noted, the well is also a place for the traditional women's work of drawing water, usually in the early morning or evening. A noon visit to

the well might indicate either an emergency because the supply of water proved inadequate to the day's need or a situation in which the woman would not be welcome with her sisters. In fact, though, we are given no explanation of the reason for this anomaly, and readers should be cautious about making assumptions on this point. The Samaritan woman is surprised at Jesus' desire to drink the water she has drawn from their well. Drinking from a common source shattered a complexly and successfully constructed hierarchy between Jews and Samaritans. This practice of unequal persons gathering around the source of water has a long and complex history in many parts of the world. In India, even after almost two millennia of this Gospel narrative, watering holes continue to be sites of severe discrimination between Dalits and caste communities. Because one of the goals of Hindu-based dharma is to pursue purity and avoid pollution in everyday life, water, which is a means of purification, must not be contaminated by the touch of those considered polluted (Dalits). In a study of rural India in our new millennium, it was discovered that access to water continues to be governed by asymmetrical caste conventions and discriminatory social practices detrimental to Dalits. The following words by a group of reputed sociologists are instructive even if alarming:

While complete denial of access to a particular water source (well, tank, tubewell, etc.) designated as upper-caste is quite common, what is even more common is the imposition of deferential treatment on Dalits. For instance, Dalits have to wait for non-Dalits to fill water first, and have to vacate the well if non-Dalits arrive; the practice ensures that Dalits wait to one side, and that their vessels do not touch those of the upper-caste persons who are drawing water or waiting for their turn (Shah, Mander, Thorat, Deshpande and Baviskar 2006: 75).

What is not stated in this sociological finding, which is so clear from this biblical passage, is the fact that such injustice overwhelmingly affects Dalit women. Because women are the ones who are responsible for the household chores involving provision of water for the family, Dalit women bear the brunt of the mostly discriminatory, often disrespectful, and sometimes violent dynamics surrounding common water sources in India. In a recent article on the existing dialectics between 'waters of life and waters of struggle', Philip V. Peacock comments on the relationship between caste and women within the politics of water: '[T]he issue of water scarcity and pollution and its resulting impact on the weaker sections of society are closely connected with issues of justice and peace, with issues of caste and gender, therefore we cannot approach water conflict in isolation and must see it in the context of these other issues as well' (2007: 22).

*At the Center and Dexterously Moving between
the Samaritan Woman and Jewish Disciples*

In presenting this narrative John weaves together concrete social markers: particular social persons meet at an unambiguous place in the course of a specific time span. The different social statuses of Jesus and the Samaritan women is a major theme. And Jesus takes the initiative to cross this boundary. In so doing he moves into the world of the Samaritan woman in order to invite her into another world, one of promise, freedom, and fullness. It may be argued that the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman both reflects and surmounts the inequity surrounding the well. Jesus' actions and conversation, when viewed with suspicion and scrutiny, can be constructed as a drama that depicts the victimization of the Samaritan woman. One Asian voice puts this baldly: in the end the Samaritan woman is also 'a victim of the author of John and, on the narrative level, a victim of Jesus' (Kim 1997: 112). Surekha Nelavala, another Asian scholar, who reads this text in conjunction with a story of a poor and exploited Dalit maid servant, finds Jesus' initiative to cross the social boundaries between Jews and Samaritans deeply empowering. It serves as a model for 'the privileged to take an active and effective role for the liberation of the oppressed', and it also accentuates 'the importance of the oppressed to claim justice by resisting discriminatory practices' (2007).

One strategy to circumvent making a choice between a mimetic model (arguing that Jesus represents a replication of colonial power relations between victim and victimizer) and a resistance model (reading Jesus as initiating liberation from colonial power relations between the subaltern and dominant class/caste) for viewing Jesus' relationship with the Samaritan would be to complicate the ease with which we settle for the binary world of interactions in this narrative. After all, when in doubt in settling a dispute between two parties it is often judicious to bring in another group that has been hanging around in the same vicinity. What if we interpret the centrality and primacy of the agency of Jesus as stubbornly residing in-between the Samaritan woman and the disciples? The Gospel writer leaves the male disciples in the background and quickly moves the narrative to zero in on Jesus and the Samaritan woman. The picture of Jesus, a single Jewish male, who encounters the multiply married Samaritan woman near a somewhat deserted well at noon enthralls most readers. Yet Jesus' disciples are also artfully and willfully woven into this narrative. Jesus as the agent of undertaking the will of God is immersed in two dialogues: one with the Samaritan woman and the other with his disciples.

Both of these conversation partners—the woman as would be expected by culturally normed gender roles, and the male disciples atypically—are

depicted as going to obtain basic material things. Water and food often complement each other in the Gospel of John. And both of these, while utilized for ordinary sustenance and ritual practices, become symbols that are drawn upon to reveal the Christ, that is, the 'living water' (4.10) and 'the bread of life' (6: 35). These discourse partners are led into a conversation that invites each of them to a conversion of seeing with and beyond the things that they can offer Jesus. Both are subtly derided to move between literal and metaphoric thinking. There is a form of compelling dialogue that one explicitly notices between Jesus and the Samaritan woman on the one hand and between Jesus and the disciples on the other. Yet Jesus' implicit offering to become triangulated in this discourse, in order to bring his dialogue partners to confront the possibilities of another dialogue between themselves, must not be discounted as part of the drama. A sort of 'double vision' emerges from the discourse of Jesus. There is the vision that each of these conversation partners will know Jesus in the complexity of their respective social and historical worlds, even as they are invited to be transformed by a meta-historical knowledge that Jesus 'is truly the Savior of the world' (4.42). But there is also another aspect of this vision that reconfigures the Samaritan woman and the disciples as representing complementary components of a fuller or more abundant (to use John's terminology) vision of human community: woman seeker and male devotees, water bearer and food deliverers, and not-so-pure-Samaritans and somewhat-more-pure disciples are riskily brought within mediatory proximity when Jesus is taken to be at the center of their world.

It is appropriate to draw attention to the subversion of traditional roles in this narrative. Even while complementariness is loosely construed between these two representative actors (the Samaritan woman and the disciples), the text exhibits a certain proclivity to elevate the agency of the woman while attenuating the initiative of the male disciples. She holds center stage through most of this narrative and the disciples are inserted mainly to supplement theologically the discourse Jesus has started about water and his own identity. The side show, which clearly is more of a monologue by Jesus to his disciples on food and his identity, would not make sense without the earlier substantive dialogue that Jesus had with the Samaritan woman on living water. Monica Melanchthon's experiment to read this story with Indian theological students attests to this valorizing of the Samaritan woman's agency: 'The women enacted the narrative of the Samaritan woman portraying the woman protagonist as the outcast woman who meets Jesus at the well designated for Dalits and engages Jesus in a conversation of caste and culture in India. The woman is shown as being responsible for introducing Jesus to a day in the life of a Dalit woman' (2007: 46). It is this initiative modeled by the Samaritan woman that becomes a paradigm for Dalit women. They are rooted in the belief and filled with the hope that

‘[w]omen are not passive recipients of welfare, but in fact could become active promoters and facilitators of social transformation’ (Melanchthon 2007: 48).

In keeping with this interpretation, the uncertainty of whether Jesus drank the water that he had asked for from the Samaritan woman or whether he ate the food that he himself had perhaps requested that the disciples go out and buy may be circuitously settled. One might resourcefully re-read Jesus’ apparent nonparticipation in the drink and food exchange as a tactical refusal. This refusal to be in solidarity with either the Samaritan woman or the disciples was a protest against the aberration of social distance that would deny different communities the freedom to openly eat and drink together. In the Indian context, where commensality is proscribed between Dalits and ‘high’ caste communities, this ambiguous exchange (direct in verbal dialogue but oblique in performative action) can easily be understood as a complex subversive-mimetic strategy. Jesus overcomes social distance by drawing separate groups toward each other in his persona, and he replicates the social distance but refuses to practice commensality. In a way, this mimicry must also be read through the motif of hope that a new and reconciled community will materialize around Jesus. Jesus’ location in the center between the Samaritan woman and the Jewish male disciples becomes an invitation for them to bring food and water together as a sign of a community reconciled in the source of the living water and the bread of life. We may see the concrete realization of this hope at the end of the narrative. Jesus and (we may presume) his disciples not only ate and drank with the Samaritan community but also ‘stayed there two days’ (4.40). Jesus will pick up this theme of the hope of mutual indwelling among all his followers later when he states, ‘Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them’ (6.56). When we remind ourselves that the Gospel of John does not include the narrative of the Last Supper, these signs of hope involving eating and drinking around the person of Jesus seem to reflect the ideal of a Eucharistic community. Jesus as a mediatory hyphen removes himself even while he remains for the sake of reconciling the Samaritan woman and his Jewish disciples. Yet, this Jesus wishes for more.

*Beside Each Other on the Ground and Yet Moving
Dangerously and Abundantly Beyond*

The initial rebuff of both the Samaritan woman and Jesus’ disciples helped to stimulate theological reflection about the ambivalent nature of water and food. They are both necessary and yet insufficient in the journey of the Jesus way. The Evangelist skillfully weaves together the theme of ‘Jesus the Giver of Living Water’ (4.7b-15) with the theme ‘on food and time’ (4.31-38). This represents Jesus moving between the literal and the metaphorical

as he allows the discourse with the Samaritan woman and his disciples to complement his movement to help them toward accepting him as the 'I am'. It is astounding indeed that the first allusion to Jesus being the 'I am' comes in Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman ('Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you"', 4.26) while she is still at the edge, just as his own disciples also approach him at the same edge (4.27). If the movement toward each other because of journeying toward Jesus was sociologically and culturally demanding for both the Samaritan woman and the Jewish disciples, this movement toward identifying God with the person and work of Jesus was theologically startling and threatening, even blasphemous. Yet this is the direction that the narrative has decisively taken. Theology disrupts the seamless flow of history and materiality. History also ruptures its own boundaries. Inter-location is a form of border crossing. The historical, the literal, and the material are hybridized with the meta-historical, the metaphorical, and the spiritual.

It will be instructive for us to focus attention on the transaction taking place between the historical and the meta-historical with regard to water and food. Jesus the one who asks for water is transposed into the Giver of Living Water (4.7b-15), and Jesus' who sends his disciples to buy food is transformed into the Bread of Life sent from God (6.35). Jesus is the bread that is broken and gifted to the world. 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and complete his work' (4.34). Jesus' unexpected request for water occasions a discussion that moves from social anomalies to theological proclamation and interpretation. The woman's question in response to Jesus' request for water (4.9) shows her to be both conversant with and ready to challenge Jesus on his neglect of the social customs of their two peoples. Her subsequent comments remain very practical and literal (4.11, 15), while his side of the conversation moves to another plane as he speaks of the gift of God and 'living water' that leaves one never thirsting again. If he wants to talk theology, she is able to engage him in relationship to a tradition common to Jews and Samaritans; namely, their ancestor Jacob who gave both of their peoples the well (4.12). She raises the question of Jesus' status relative to that of Jacob, and Jesus is shown to be superior. The new water that Jesus gives will not only be taken into the body from without to slake their thirst forever, but also well up from within 'them' as 'a spring of water gushing up to eternal life' (4.14). As a complement to Jesus' discourse on water, the ever-practical and down to earth disciples find their voice toward the end and propose to give him something to eat (4.31). Jesus' response changes the plane of the discourse by equating what nourishes him with doing the will of the one who sent him and completing his work (a proleptic reference to the work of judgment and giving life that will be explained in John 5). The reference to food segues to the harvest and to the question of the time for reaping, which is theirs to enjoy.

Water and food are linked up with living water and bread of life. To miss this connection would be to truncate life from Life. It is in Jesus that the historical and the meta-historical are brought to wholeness. Jesus as the mediator of 'life' or 'eternal life' is a common theme in this Gospel, especially in this and the subsequent two chapters. In the pericope that follows the story of the Samaritan woman, Jesus heals the royal official's son who is at the point of death—an act labeled Jesus' 'second sign' (4.46-54). The discourse following the healing of the man by the Sheep Gate Pool in John 5 interprets Jesus' act of healing on the Sabbath as the act of an obedient 'son' doing the 'father's' work, which is defined as judgment and giving life (5.19-30). That theme continues in the extended and multi-layered 'bread of life' discourse (6.25-59).

It is this co-mingling of the historical with the theological that becomes most problematic for most of us who are somewhat obedient to the dictates of the solely historical. Yet the meta-historical cannot be sacrificed *a priori* in biblical interpretation. Not only does such a deliberate under-reading (or one might even say over-reading of the historical) do little justice to the various dimensions and potentialities of this text, but such a constricted and pre-programmed interpretation discounts the high degree of expectancy and broad range of analysis that propel local readers toward the Bible. A post-colonial interpreter may also need to entertain the challenge of being a post-historical theologian. Of course, just as this interpretation has demonstrated, we do not ever imagine that one can either be a-historical or anti-historical. Rather, biblical interpretation aspires to detect 'the alternate truth of Christ' even as one is mangled in the 'hidden truths of the empire'. Drawing upon the notions of Christological ambiguity and surplus, Joerg Rieger pushes theologians 'to uncover not only the hidden truth of the empire (its real face) but initiate a search for alternative truth that points to a different reality' (2007: 316). Adapting the sense of 'a different reality' to this biblical interpretation, it is important to resist the lure of historical reductionism and continue to grapple with our theological claims for Jesus. Again Rieger is helpful: 'If Christ is truly God and truly human, for instance, he cannot be simply coterminous with the empire, and it is this surplus of his person and work that will ultimately set us free' (2007: 318).

Bound to the Ground Even While Freed into the Abundantly Beyond

There are many inter-locations that have surfaced in this interpretation of Jn 4.1-42. The term 'inter-location' has been conjured to express the seemingly pointless and somewhat seamless mutual trespassing that characterizes the dynamism of this narrative and its interpretation. First, there is the movement between the animated edges and the engaging center. Jesus is skirting the edge and opening up a potent center. There is the Samaritan woman

who, even while journeying outside the gates of her own community, is luring Jesus to experience her own life situation and theological orientation. She even sets up a state of affairs where Jesus becomes the object of Samaritan hospitality. There is also the role of the disciples, who, even while being thought of as constituting the central co-journeying community around Jesus, are kept on the side lines and made to fit in as secondary complements (theology and food) to the main dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (theology and water). Second, there is the mediation between Jesus in solidarity with human beings in their different social locations and his distance from them as the reconciling one. Thus, through Jesus, those who submit to his way and work will be led outside of each self toward the completion of the other. Third, inter-location exists in the movement between the historical and the meta-historical. All the actors in this narrative are not only caught up in the rootedness of Jesus but also connected with Christological surplus. Thus, the historical, literal, and material locations need to be mediated through a process of productive trespassing between the meta-historical, metaphorical, and spiritual dimensions of this narrative.

A consequence of this joint project is the rediscovery that liberative reading requires that we work in the liminality of interpretive categories. Biblical interpretation is indeed trans-versed through committed interlocution of different concrete locations. By trans-version we wish to indicate the reciprocity that is possible in conversation and conversion through the process of biblical hermeneutics. Through this cooperative interpretive project, it has become quite apparent that a gender analysis of this text is necessary but inadequate. It needs to interact with cultural readings in order to hope to plumb any passage. This fits with the understanding of a 'feminist' reading that is broader than a gendered reading, but one that includes analysis of race, class, caste, and culture. It disallows 'essentialist' readings (e.g. 'women's experience'), and recognizes that concrete realities are not neat and tidy. Such trans-versions bolster unexpected interaction, mutual transgression, and reciprocal transformation in the practice of biblical interpretation. Thus, creative words of cooperating hermeneuts co-mingle with interpretive categories to engender abundant life for identifiable communities through trans-version of the copious Word. In the end, through all the inter-locations and trans-versions, one has to also be content with a communal affirmation that is personal but not individualistic: 'It is no longer because of what you have said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world' (4.42).

One limitation of working across multiple locations involving the trans-version of both cross-cultural exegetes and border-crossing biblical actors has to do with the erasure of situated Christian disciples from whom creative interpretations claim to emanate and on whom they seek to rest.

There certainly is truth in R.S. Sugirtharajah's contention that '[s]acred texts are like refugees eternally seeking a "home"' (2008: 64). Yet, this is only half the truth. Christian disciples in various parts of the world are also refugees, sometimes provisionally and some other times permanently seeking sanctuary in the Bible. Both dimensions of this home-making and refuge-seeking are played out in specific historical settings. After all, biblical interpretation that matters is always local. Like politics, it intends to be concrete in order to justify or elicit action for the ongoing vocation of everyday Christian living. Often, scholars create an imaginative narrative for fashioning novel interpretive insights. We fuse religious and literary texts, social and material sciences, sacred and secular histories, local and global cultures, suppressed and dominant peoples, old and contemporary concepts, obvious and concealed motifs, and native and foreign concepts to engender something appealingly new. Yet the lines between fantastic and fertile biblical interpretation cannot be blurred even in a search to bring them together. Fantasy involves flight of the mind while fertility implies being rooted in earthiness. The test of interpretation is the life that is extended through a creative and constructive coalescence of the imaginative and the down-to-earth. While criteria for deciding on what is translatable into specific historical contexts and what will definitely remain as fabulous figments of hermeneutic imagination may never be agreed upon, the following questions must be methodically and relentlessly asked: Who lives for or by the biblical interpretations that are generated? Do they allow persons or communities to theologically and biblically legitimate life-enhancing actions for the sake of becoming faithful, fearless, and free Christian disciples? How may we make provision for situated Christian disciples to relocate into the domain of biblical interpreters and thus enjoin the process of productive trans-version?

In the end, one is left with an array of questions awaiting more explorative research. We are grateful to our common friend R.S. Sugirtharajah for bringing us together to collaboratively write this essay to honor his contribution to both our fields of theology and biblical interpretation. We are also thankful that our offering for his festschrift has given queries that could bring us together for future writing projects. After all, the vocation of a scholar also involves the responsibility to spawn an assortment of provoked creative minds!

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METONYMIES OF EMPIRE:
SEXUAL HUMILIATION AND GENDER
MASQUERADE IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION*

Stephen D. Moore

Imperial Rome is represented in Revelation as a woman (14.8; 17.1-18; 18.3-9, 16; 19.2). Why? Because Babylon, the prototypical evil empire in Jewish tradition and the code name for Rome in Revelation, was already represented as female in that tradition? Or because Rome was already represented as female in the cult of the goddess Roma, one with deep roots in Roman Asia? Assumedly there is no need to choose exclusively between these two alternatives. If I fixate on the latter alternative in the present essay, it is only because it represents the road less traveled. But all roads lead equally to Rome in and around Revelation.

Here, first, is what the main thoroughfare has looked like. As scholars have long surmised, Revelation renames Rome as 'Babylon',¹ confers the name of another city upon it, because that city, also an empire, epitomizes in Jewish scripture and tradition human empire at its most destructive,² but also at its most seductive. And that predatory and alluring empire (whose

* I dedicate to R.S. Sugirtharajah an essay that I frankly cannot imagine him reading with much interest. Yet it was Sugi's warm encouragement and personal example a decade ago that emboldened me to set foot on the path that has led me to this and other such experiments. He will always have my gratitude and admiration.

I presented an earlier version of the essay at a joint session of the LGBT/Queer Hermeneutics Consultation and the Cultural Studies Section of the Society of Biblical Literature at its 2008 Annual Meeting in Boston. I was fortunate (and a little terrified) to have as my respondents Randall Bailey and Kwok Pui-lan. I am still attempting to assimilate certain of their more challenging critiques; in the meanwhile the essay remains too much like the paper. I read a still earlier version of the essay at the University of Richmond, Virginia. I am grateful to Jennifer Glancy for insightful suggestions about its possible development.

1. As does 1 Peter (5.13), 4 Ezra (3.1-3), 2 Baruch (11.1), and the Sibylline Oracles (5.143, 159). Dissenters from the critical-scholarly consensus identifying Revelation's Babylon with Rome have been few. But even within the consensus there are unsuspected and unsettling spaces that have yet to be examined, as I attempt to show in this essay.

2. Leaving aside the question of whether Revelation is pre- or post-70 CE. If the latter, Rome is most of all Babylon because it has destroyed the rebuilt Jerusalem temple.

imagined antithesis is the Empire of God) comes already sexed and gendered, minimally at least, in the tradition that John of Revelation has inherited and internalized, Babylon being a feminine noun in both Hebrew (*Bābel*) and Greek (*Babylōn*).

But is Babylon also the object of sexual shaming in the Jewish scriptures? In the six principal oracles against Babylon found in the prophetic literature (Isa. 13.1-22; 14.22-23; 21.1-10; 47.1-15; Jer. 25.12-14; 50.1-51.64), only Isa. 47.3a, 'Your nakedness shall be uncovered and your shame shall be seen' (*tiggāl erwātēk gam tērāeh herpātēk*), presents itself as a compelling candidate for such interpretation. Another less prurient portion of the same oracle is explicitly taken up in Revelation's mock lament over fallen Babylon (Isa. 47.8-9; Rev. 18:7-8).³ Yet it is not as though John is hesitant to direct sexual slurs at Babylon. In this he easily outdoes Isaiah or Jeremiah.

In marked contrast to Revelation, the epithet 'whore' (Heb. *zānā*; Gr. *pornē*) is never leveled at Babylon in the Jewish scriptures,⁴ or, so far as I am aware, in any other extant Jewish source prior to Revelation. This may be coupled with a second observation. The image, recurrent in Jeremiah, of Yahweh's enemies being compelled to imbibe from the cup of his wrath (Jer. 13.13-14; 25.15-29; 48.26; 51.39, 57; see also Isa. 51.17-23; Lam. 4.21), is an arresting one for John. He recycles it in Rev. 14.8, 17.2, and 18.3—but he also sexualizes it. In John's sweaty hands the cup metaphor consistently becomes an allegory of Babylon/Rome's *porneia*: 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great who caused all nations to drink of the wine of her lustful passion' (*tou thymou tēs porneias autēs*—14.8; the images of wine, drunkenness, and *porneia* recur in 17.2 and 18.3, and are implicit in condensed form in 19.2).⁵ Revelation's pornoprophecy, far from simply being siphoned, already fully fermented, from the pornoprophecy of the Hebrew prophets, is John's own distinctive concoction.⁶

The Babylon of Hebrew prophecy, then, in and of itself, provides little in the way of answers to the question of why Rome is represented in Revelation not just as a woman but as a prostitute. For that we need to set foot on the less-traveled path to which I earlier alluded. The Rome-as-Babylon equation lacks a crucial middle term. Implicit in the Rome-as-Babylon motif, as

3. On which see Fekkes 1994: 220-21. Isa. 47.3a is less lurid in LXX: *anakyphthēsetai he aischynē sou phanēsontai hoi oneidismoī sou* ('Your shame shall be uncovered, your reproaches brought to light').

4. It is Israel that is the primary recipient of the epithet (Jer. 3.6-10; Ezek. 16.15-22; 23.1-49; Hos. 4.12-13; 5.3), while it is secondarily applied to Jerusalem (Isa. 1.21), Tyre (Isa. 23.15-17), and Nineveh (Nah. 3.4).

5. Translations of Revelation throughout this essay are my own.

6. Feminist scholarship on Revelation has frequently focused on its relationship to this lewd and lurid strand of Hebrew prophecy; see especially Selvidge 1996.

we shall see, is a Rome-as-Roma-as-Babylon motif.⁷ In other words, John's counter-imperial representation of Rome as a certain kind of woman is parasitic on, and parodic of, pro-imperial representations of Rome as an altogether different kind of woman. Parody of the Roman imperial order in Revelation reaches its scurrilous climax in the depiction of the goddess Roma, austere and noble personification of the *urbs aeterna*, as a tawdry whore who has had too much to drink (Moore 2006: 106).⁸ And so to Dea Roma we now turn.

The Hardest Woman Warrior in the Roman World

That the Roman imperial cult is a major polemical target of Revelation has long been a commonplace of critical scholarship on the book. That polemic is customarily explained with reference to the importance of the province of Asia for the origins and evolution of the cult. Augustus and his successor Tiberius only permitted two temples to be established in their honor during their respective principates. Both were Asian temples, Augustus's being erected in Pergamon, Tiberius's in Smyrna, two of the seven cities to whose Christian assemblies Revelation is addressed.

That, however, is only part of the story of how the province became tutor to the metropolis on the art of constructing religious cults that would be consummately expressive of Roman hegemony. The provincial temple that the Assembly of Asia received permission to build at Pergamon in 29 BCE was to be a shrine dedicated not only to Augustus but also to Roma (Friesen 2001: 25-32; Burrell 2004: 17-22). This is not to imply, however, that the institutionalization of the cult of Roma in Asia coincided with the institutionalization of the imperial cult. A temple to *Thea Rhōmē* had stood at Smyrna since 195 BCE, the first known temple to Roma in the east, and hence anywhere.⁹ The cultic veneration of Roman supremacy thus had primary expression in the province of Asia in the cult of *Thea Rhōmē* long before it found supplementary expression in the imperial cult.¹⁰ And while the imperial

7. This is not the only possible path, needless to say. We could also divert through the prophetic texts adduced in n. 4 above and arrive at Rome-as-prostitute that way, but that road is already too crowded. Ian Boxall lists as first of the 'small number of issues of common interest' to modern commentators on Rev. 17 'the Old Testament background to the vision' (2001: 53).

8. In effect, the present essay is an elaboration of that statement.

9. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.56: Smyrna 'had also been the first... to erect a temple in honor of Rome [*seque primos templum urbis Romae statuisse*], during the consulship of Marcus Porcius Cato, when Rome's power was already great, but not yet at its apex...' (my translation).

10. As in other provinces of Asia Minor, cults of Roma flourishing not only in coastal cities and on the islands (including Chios, about twelve miles off-shore from Smyrna), but in a number of inland cities as well (Price 1984: 43).

cult does enable us to make sense of much of Revelation's anti-Roman invective, especially that found in chapter 13, *Thea Rhōmē* enables us to understand why it is that Rome is represented both as a woman and a prostitute in a further major portion of that invective, as we shall see, namely, that concentrated in chapter 17.¹¹

The cult of Roma reached deep into the civic life of Roman Asia, as evidenced by its sheer longevity. The Romaia, an elaborate series of religious rituals, athletic contests, and other public spectacles designed to honor the goddess, 'were still celebrated at Smyrna four centuries after the establishment of the cult' (Mellor 1975: 51).¹² Romaia were also staged at Sardis and Pergamon. A cult of Roma is likewise attested for Thyatira and especially for Ephesus (to confine ourselves to the Asian cities mentioned in Revelation), issuing in an Ephesian temple dedicated to Roma and Divus Julius in 29 BCE and one dedicated to Roma and Augustus sometime before 6 BCE (Mellor 1975: 57-58, 138, 167; Price 1984: 43; Friesen 2001: 25-27).

In essence, the cult of Roma represented a solution to a problem. The problem for the Hellenistic cities in which the cult originated was that of coming to terms with a power that was at once irresistible and external to the city, emanating from a place far distant from it, yet extending deep within it, and a permanent source both of potential devastation and essential benefaction. In all of this, that power was structurally similar to that of the traditional gods, and the cults of the gods thus became the logical model for the inhabitants of the cities for managing and placating that power, but also for representing it to themselves, in terms that were not imposed from without but adapted from their own traditions (Price 1984: 29-30, 43-44, 52).¹³

11. Ronald Mellor, in what has become the standard monograph on the cult of Roma, surmises in passing that 'there are even allusions to the cult... in the attack on the Roman Empire in the Apocalypse of St. John' (1975: 127). Among New Testament scholars, David E. Aune has ventured farthest down this speculative path, so far as I am aware; see Aune 1998: 919-28. Of particular interest to Aune is a coin minted in Asia in 71 CE that depicts Roma seated on Rome's seven hills with a personified river Tiber at her feet; these details he links with Rev. 17.9, the 'seven hills on which the woman is seated', and 17.1, 'the great whore who is seated on many waters' (cf. 17.15). Aune's erudite discussion, however, lacks any element of gender analysis. (Symptomatically, his bibliography on Rev. 17-18, which lists more than fifty works in four languages [1998: 905-906], does not include a single feminist study of Revelation.) Aune's positing of a Roma-Babylon connection in Revelation was anticipated by, among others, Beauvery 1983 and Collins 1984: 121. See also, more recently, Knight 2005. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, for her part, identifies the woman clothed with the sun (Rev. 12), rather than Babylon, with Roma (2007: 139).

12. Correspondingly, the temple of Roma appeared on coins minted in Smyrna 'well into the third century of the Empire' (Mellor 1975: 51).

13. I am adapting to the Roma cult Price's influential interpretation of the symbolic function of the Hellenistic ruler cults and the Roman imperial cult in the east.

At base, the cult of Roma was an atropaic celebration of strength. Moreover, it was a celebration of the strength of a city whose very name, in Greek at least, *meant* strength: *Rhōmē*. The more of the Greek world this city named Strength took possession of, the more the inhabitants of that world must have marveled at the aptness of the name (Erskine 1995: 370), as is, indeed, suggested by various homonymic flourishes in the Greek literature of the period. A first century BCE geographical poem, for instance, notes that Rome ‘has a name equal to its power’ (Pseudo-Scymnus, *The Circumnavigation of the Earth*, lines 231-32, cited in Erskine 1995: 372). Aelius Aristides, in his (in)famous encomium of Rome from the mid-second century CE, takes full opportunity of the city’s felicitous name, likening Rome to ‘a man who surpasses everybody else in size and strength [*rhōmē*]’, and adding: ‘Thus, the name of the city is significant and what you see around you is nothing but *Rhōmē*/strength’ (Aelius Aristides, *Roman Oration*, cited in Erskine 1995: 374). Plutarch, for his part, writing a little earlier, implies that the city’s name has been a subject for etymological speculation: ‘Some say that the Pelasgians, after they had wandered over most of the earth and overpowered most men, settled there, and on account of their strength [*rhōmē*] in arms they named the city in this way’ (Plutarch, *Life of Romulus* 1, cited in Erskine 1995: 372). So widely remarked was the *Rhōmē*/‘strength’ homonym, apparently, that it even spilled over into Latin literature, notwithstanding the fact that *Roma*, the city’s Latin name, carried no such double meaning. ‘Rome, your name is fated to rule the earth’, declaims Tibullus; and Ovid, Horace, and Livy likewise play compulsively on the name (Tibullus 2.5.51, cited in Erskine 1995: 378; see also Ovid, *Amores* 2.9a.17-18; Horace, *Epodes* 16.2; Livy, Pref. 4, cf. 30.44.8).

Strikingly, however—and highly relevant for the reading of Babylon in Revelation toward which we are inching—the deity created to symbolize the irresistible strength of Rome was not a god but a goddess, one whose very name was ‘Strength’. The two earliest extant visual representations of *Thea Rhōmē* display that strength differently. A headless statue of her from the island of Delos, probably stemming from the late second century BCE, is unarmed and pacific; while she is armed and warlike on the earliest Greek coin that depicts her, a didrachma from Locri Epizephyrrii in Magna Graecia from around 204 BCE (Mellor 1975: 145-47).

Price deals with the Roma cult only in passing. Unlike Mellor, however, he treats it as an expression of authentic religiosity (1984: 24, 43)—not surprising in a book that amounts to a thoroughgoing deconstruction of the binary opposition between religion and politics endemic to earlier scholarship. For an extended critique of Mellor read through the lens of Price, see Knight 2005: 107-116.



Figure 1. *Late first century CE relief depicting the goddess Roma, with male in toga representing the Roman senate, welcoming the Emperor Domitian.*

As Roma matures, however, and representations of her begin to proliferate, her warlike aspect predominates. Modeled on Athena, goddess of war and wisdom, but also on the Amazons, Roma typically appears in military dress (sometimes with bared breast, Amazon-style: see Figure 1), wearing a crested Roman helmet, and occasionally holding a spear¹⁴ but more often

14. As she does, for example, in the fragmentary relief of her found in Caesarea Maritima, which appear to date from the late first century BCE or the early first century CE. Her other hand holds a shield, and her head, which is damaged, was probably helmeted. Caesarea also contained a colossal cult statue of the goddess in the temple to Roma and Augustus that Herod the Great had built there (Josephus,

clutching a parazonium, the ceremonial short sword or outsized dagger that was symbolic of military rank. The parazonium also tends to feature in representations of the Roman emperors and of Mars and Virtus, the latter being the divine personification of military valor and manly virtue, and a figure who fuses with Roma: they are frequently all but indistinguishable in their representations (more on which below). Typically, too, Roma holds a miniature Nike (victory personified) in her right hand, again on the model of Athena (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. *Sestertius*, ca. 66 CE. Obverse: Bust of Emperor Nero. Reverse: Goddess Roma seated on cuirass, holding Nike in extended right hand, parazonium in left hand, shields behind.

All in all, however, Roma is a more unrelentingly martial figure than Athena, who, after all, was also the goddess of household arts and crafts, such as spinning and weaving, and other unwarlike activities. As befits the tutelary deity of a city whose military conquests dwarf those of Athens, Roma has resolutely set such pacific pursuits aside. Again and again on coins minted under Nero, Galba, Vespasian, and Titus, Roma is seated, warrior-style, upon her own cuirass, or alternatively, upon a mound of shields (see Vermeule 1959: 31-33, 41, 66, 87). An invincible warrior, she is triumphantly enthroned upon the weapons of the armies she has vanquished. A late first-century CE marble frieze from Cumae, the first Greek colony on the Italian mainland, pushes further into triumphal hyperbole: the goddess is not seated but standing, because the mound of war booty behind her is too vast to form a throne (Figure 3).

Jewish War 1.21.7; *Antiquities* 15.9.6), although that statue, modeled on Hera rather than Athena, seems to have represented her as unarmed. For more, see Gersht 2001: 73-76.



Figure 3. Late first century CE marble frieze depicting the goddess Roma, standing, with mound of war booty.

Roma's military prowess and irresistible might are also the principal subjects of the hymn by Melinno of Lesbos honoring her, a panegyric of five Sapphic stanzas.¹⁵ 'Hail, Roma, daughter of Ares', it begins, 'warlike mistress with a girdle of gold [*chryseomitra daïphrōn anassa*]'—the belt worn by Amazons. The poem proceeds to pile up masculinizing appellations, a feature all the queerer for that fact that, not only is it addressed to a female figure, it is, so far as we know, also the work of a female poet. 'Fate has given you the royal glory of everlasting rule so that you may govern with lordly might [*ophra koiranēon echoisa kartos agemoneuēs*]', Melinno declaims. 'With a sure hand you steer the cities of men [*su d'aspheleōs kybernas astea laōn*]' In the final stanza, the warrior queen abruptly becomes a mother, but even the maternal imagery is torqued to extol her innate masculinity: 'Certainly, out of all people you alone bring forth the strongest men [*kratistous andras*], great warriors as they are, just as if producing the crop of Demeter from the land'.¹⁶

Roma and Demeter/Ceres also constitute a couple—a butch/femme couple, to be precise—on the *Ara pacis augustae*, the magnificent altar consecrated in Rome in 9 BCE to celebrate the *Pax Augusta* putatively established through Augustus's victories in Hispania and Gaul. Nowhere is Roma more

15. The hymn is analyzed in Mellor 1975: 121-24, and Erskine 1995: 368-69. Also worth consulting is the older analysis in Bowra 1957: 21-28. The translation I am using is that of Erskine.

16. Tellingly, the hymn survives only because the fifth-century CE compiler, John Stobaeus, saw fit to include it in the section of his anthology entitled *Peri andreias*, 'On (Manly) Courage'.

suggestively gendered, indeed, than on that altar, where the panel devoted to her forms a pair with that devoted to Ceres, goddess of grain and fertility and paragon of motherhood, chastity, and domestic female virtue in general. Although the Roma panel survives only in fragmentary form, it is clear that the goddess is enthroned once again upon a pile of weapons, denoting her martial might, while Mother Ceres is enthroned upon the nurturing earth that is her element. Both goddesses are productive of the peace that the Ara pacis celebrates. But whereas Roma represents the peace procured through force of arms and military conquest, Ceres represents the peace produced through agricultural abundance and fecund harvests.¹⁷ As represented on the Ara pacis, Ceres emblemizes mythic femininity, while Roma emblemizes mythic masculinity.

The full hyperbolic dimensions of Roma's paradoxical masculinity, however, as represented in the stereotypical images of her that survive, may best be gauged by employing the gender scripts of Roman literary sources to illuminate them, most especially those scripts for the successful enactment and embodiment of Roman masculinity. Craig A. Williams's monograph *Roman Homosexuality*, the real topic of which is encapsulated in its subtitle, *Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity*, remains the most ambitious distillation to date from Roman literary sources of the rules of masculine performance (Williams 1999).¹⁸ Much of the chapter entitled 'Effeminacy and Masculinity' may be read as incisive commentary on the images of Roma that we have been considering—incisive and inadvertent, as Roma is not so much as mentioned in Williams's book.

The language of masculinity in the elite male Roman authors whom Williams is mainly mining 'often invokes such notions as *imperium* ("domination") and *fortitudo* ("strength" [1999: 127])'. Dominion and control, both over others and over oneself, are identified by Williams (building upon Foucault) as 'the central imperative' of Roman masculinity (1999: 127; see also Foucault 1985: 65-77). What then are we to make of the goddess whose very name is 'Strength' and whose salient characteristic is *imperium* (as Melinno of Lesbos so effusively acknowledged) if not the very embodiment of the

17. My interpretation of the Ceres/Roma contrast on the Ara pacis is indebted to Spaeth 1996: 144. For Ceres as emblem of Roman feminine virtue, see Spaeth 1996: 103-124.

18. There is relatively little that is original in Williams's excellent book. In effect it is an encyclopedic compendium of twenty years of classical scholarship on ancient Greek and Roman sex and gender—masculine gender especially but not exclusively—work pioneered by such scholars as Kenneth Dover, Paul Veyne, and Michel Foucault and extended and refined by such scholars as John Winkler, David Halperin, Amy Richlin, Eve Cantarella, Maud Gleason, Judith Hallett, and Marilyn Skinner. Significant related work that has appeared since Williams's study includes Halperin 2004 and Skinner 2005.

central imperative of Roman masculinity—the imperative, the command, to command? *Imperium* permeated the entire social fabric of ancient Roman culture. It was the dominion that a free Roman man exercised over women and slaves, that military commanders exercised over Roman armies, that magistrates exercised over the Roman people, that the Roman people exercised over subject peoples, and that the Roman emperor exercised over one and all (Williams 1999: 133). The supreme symbol, however, of Roman *imperium* housed in the temple erected at Pergamon was not one but double—the male Augustus and the female Roma—just one index of the intense internal contradictions attending the hegemonic Roman ideology of masculinity, as we shall see.

Another vital term in the language of Roman masculinity was *virtus*. '[E]tymologically nothing more than "manliness"', as Williams notes, this term evoked 'broad notions of valor and ultimately "virtue", but always in a strongly gendered sense. *Virtus* is the ideal of masculine behavior that all men ought to embody, that some women have the good fortune of attaining, and that men derided as effeminate conspicuously fail to achieve' (Williams 1999: 127, 132). Roma, however, is a woman who has not so much had the good fortune of attaining *virtus*, but is, as much as anything else, the very personification of *virtus*—so much so, indeed, that, as we noted earlier, the official personification of the virtue, the deity *Virtus*, is notoriously difficult to distinguish from Roma in many of their extant visual representations. Both figures, for example, favor an Amazonian pose, and merge into each other to such a degree that Cornelius Vermeule, author of the standard work on Roma iconography, is reduced to referring to a 'Roma-Virtus type' (1959: 71).¹⁹ Myles McDonnell in his recent study *Roman Manliness* explains how this (con)fusion came about: 'So close was the identification of *virtus* with Rome that when *virtus* was honored with a state cult, the image chosen for the cult statue was the same as that of the goddess Roma herself: an armed amazon' (2006: 2).

While *virtus* tends to gravitate to male bodies it also floats free of them, and of anatomical sex as such. Seneca, for instance, states that women who attain to extraordinary displays of *virtus* ascend to the level of 'great men' (*magna viri* [*Dialogues* 12.16.2, cited in Williams 1999: 133]). Roma, although strictly speaking the epitome of inaction—she simply stands, or, more often, sits or even lounges—is, arguably, the most fully realized example of that relatively rare but highly symptomatic Roman gender type, the woman who 'overcomes' her femininity to act as befits a man. Valerius Maximus holds up for our amazement and admiration Porcia, daughter of Cato the Younger,

19. Vermeule also writes, 'The standing figure of the Amazon Roma in short skirt and slipped tunic, so like the figure of *Virtus*...' (1959: 29; cf. 41, 65-67, 83, 87-88, 96-97).

who commits suicide by swallowing live coals thereby imitating ‘the manly death of her father [*virilem patris exitum*] with a woman’s spirit’, and Lucretia who likewise commits virtuous suicide thereby revealing that she has a ‘man’s soul’ (*virilis animus*) imprisoned in a woman’s body (Valerius Maximus, 4.6.5 and 6.1.1, cited in Williams 1999: 133). Then there is the unnamed Jewish mother in 4 Maccabees, she of the seven martyred sons, and herself a paragon of masculinity according to the author (‘More noble than men in perseverance and more manly than men in endurance [*andrōn pros hypomonēn andreiotera*]!’—15.30), and who likewise takes her own life.²⁰ It seems that the manly woman of the Greco-Roman male literary imagination is irresistibly impelled to unleash deadly force upon her own female body, it being the primary inertial mass impeding her ascent to the masculine. Roma is different; the implied violence with which so many of her representations seethe is outward-directed, apparently.²¹ She is a manly woman who is sanctioned to kill others besides herself.

Seneca styles *virtus* as antithetical to ‘women’s vices’ (*mulebria vitia*), namely, *impudicitia* (‘unchastity’, ‘sexual profligacy’, ‘shamelessness’),²² ‘weakness for jewels and riches’, and ‘excessive pride in appearance’ (*Dialogues* 12.16.2, cited in Williams 1999: 318 n. 28.). Tellingly, these are also the very vices in which Revelation’s female personification of imperial Rome wallows. Babylon epitomizes feminine vice even as Roma epitomizes masculine virtue. Each would seem to be the antitype of the other, a relationship to which we shall later return.

Roma’s acute queerness emerges into even sharper relief when she is contrasted with the female personifications of other nations found in Roman imperial iconography. The temple complex known as the Sebasteion, for instance, located at Aphrodisias in Asia Minor, contains a relief representing Britannia as a half-naked, unarmed female, arm outflung, held down and menaced by an armed Roman warrior representing the emperor Claudius (Figure 4); while certain of the famous Judea Capta coins minted to celebrate the Roman suppression of the Judean revolt represent Judea as an abject female captive, seated, unarmed and in mourning, above whom towers the threatening figure of an armed Roman soldier, possibly representing the emperor Vespasian, whose weaponry includes the parazonium. Contrast the representations of Roma that we have been considering, in which the female body has migrated into the military armor and thereby been transformed from passive, abject object to active, virile agent.

20. In 4 Macc. 16.14 she is ‘found to be stronger than a man [*dynatōtera... andros*]’, and her manliness is further extolled in 15.23 (cf. 2 Macc. 7.21). For an analysis of this motif, see Moore and Anderson 1998, especially pp. 265–72.

21. Although the situation is also more complex than this, as we shall see.

22. For *impudicitia* as ‘shamelessness’, see Ginsburg 2006: 128.



Figure 4. Mid-first century CE relief from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias depicting the Emperor Claudius subduing Britannia.

Also notable is the *Gemma Augustea*, the exquisite low-relief sardonyx cameo fashioned for Augustus, which depicts two scenes, one in the upper tier of the work, the other in the lower tier (Figure 5). In the lower tableau, a company of Roman soldiers is triumphing over a cluster of cowering, defeated, barbarians, including a captive woman who is being ominously dragged into the scene by her hair. The other prominent woman on the cameo presents a rather different spectacle. Dea Roma is the central figure in the upper-tier tableau, in her customary helmet, one hand gripping a spear, the other caressing the hilt of her sword, her feet resting upon the armor of her conquered foes. She is seated serenely at Augustus's right hand, and her

company also includes other members of the Roman male super-elite, Tiberius alighting from a chariot, with Germanicus, most likely, standing next to it (Galinsky 1998: 120-21), although only Roma is conspicuously armed. In short, the contrast between the woman who customarily represents Rome in imperial iconography and the women who customarily represent barbarian nations in it could not be starker or more striking.²³



Figure 5. *The Gemma Augustea, early first century CE sardonyx cameo gem depicting the Goddess Roma enthroned with the Emperor Augustus in the upper tableau, and the erection of a tropaion (victory trophy) in the lower tableau.*

Virtus is a grammatically feminine noun—grammatically feminine but, as Williams argues, ideologically masculine: ‘Grammatical gender yields, of course, to the overarching imperative of masculine ideology’ (Williams 1999: 134).²⁴ *Roma/Rhōmē*, too, is grammatically feminine, yet masculine

23. For incisive discussion of the Claudius-Britannia relief, the Judea Capta coinage, the Gemma Augustea, and other related images, see Lopez 2008: 26-55. Lopez does not factor Roma into her analyses of Roman imperial iconography.

24. Williams is considering both *virtus* and *ratio* (‘reason’) here. McDonnell, however, cautions that *virtus* is still more elusive of univocal definition: ‘Yet *virtus* is a notoriously difficult word to translate. As in most cultures, in ancient Rome the term

on the level of ideology, or, alternatively, rhetoric. What is the relationship between grammar and rhetoric? One of tension, interruption, disruption, and subversion is the answer that has echoed forth most forcefully from poststructuralist literary criticism (de Man 1979: 3-19), and it would seem fully borne out by the contradictory figure of Roma. The word *Roma/Rhōmē* itself, grammatically feminine but rhetorically, ideologically, and conceptually masculine, might be said to be iconic of the very process that the image of Roma enjoins: the sublation of femininity in masculinity. But that process is always necessarily incomplete, according to the hegemonic Roman gender scripts. Roman masculinity is always tenuous, fragile, fluid, always threatened, always incompletely achieved, ever under siege, ever liable to lose its footing on the greased gender gradient sloping down to femininity and hence irrevocable shame, irredeemable disgrace (Gleason 1995: 59, 81; Williams 1999: 141-42; Skinner 2005: 212, 248, 254). Roma, then, is a figure in perpetual deconstruction. She holds the terms 'femininity' and 'masculinity' in constant, warring tension (no wonder she is so heavily armed), without ever reconciling them, without ever merging them into a harmonious synthesis. Each term perpetually threatens the other; each is the always unrealized negation of the other.

A prominent theme in ancient Roman literature 'is that true Roman men, who possess *virtus* by birthright', are destined to 'exercise their dominion or *imperium* not only over women... but also over foreigners, themselves implicitly likened to women', less than fully masculine, relative to the putative hypermasculinity of free Roman males (Williams 1999: 135). Greece particularly epitomized the 'feminine' softness that contrasted stereotypically with the 'masculine' hardness of Rome (Williams 1999: 135-36). Yet Greece was not the softest of the soft. Rather, argues Williams, it was the cities of Asia Minor that 'seem to have represented to Romans the ultimate in decadence and luxury and consequently softness and effeminacy' (Williams 1999: 136). Sallust, for instance, laments how Sulla's army on entering Asia immediately began to lose their hardness, the soldiers' 'fierce minds' being 'softened [*molliverant*]... in an environment of leisure [*voluptaria*]'; while Valerius Maximus declaims of the Spartan general Pausanias: 'As soon as he adopted Asian ways, he was not ashamed to soften [*mollire*] his own fortitude with the effeminate [*effeminate*] Asian style' (Sallust, *Conspiracy of Catiline* 11.5-6, and Valerius Maximus 2.6.1, cited in Williams

for manliness had a number of different denotations. Yet it is striking that a word whose etymological connection to the Latin word for man is so apparent, can be attributed not only to women, but to deities, animals, abstract ideas, and inanimate objects. As a purely linguistic phenomenon this is noteworthy, but since *virtus* was regarded by the Romans as a preeminent social and political value, its wide and sometimes odd semantic range has implications that go beyond philological significance' (2006: 3-4).

1999: 136). Such stereotypes also find expression in Virgil and Cicero (cited in Williams 1999: 136): in the *Aeneid*, the Trojans, themselves Asians, are labeled *semiviri*, 'half-men', soft and effeminate, by Italian warriors and other enemies (*Aeneid* 4.215-17, 9.598-620, 12.97-100); while Cicero attributes to Cato the Younger the claim that the Romans in their war with the Asian King Mithridates had fought 'with women' (*cum mulierculis* [*Pro Murena* 31]). These are only secondarily gender stereotypes, however; first and foremost it is ethnic stereotyping that is being enacted in these texts. But that dynamic is already implicit in the concept of 'Roman masculinity': ethnicity, no less than gender, needs its constitutive others in order to be performed and constructed.²⁵ How might the figure of Roma be situated in relation to these stereotypes?

Let us reframe this complex question. According to the hegemonic Roman gender script, masculinity was the quality of being in control of, exercising dominion over, others and also oneself, while femininity was the quality of ceding control of oneself to others (Williams 1999: 137). The notion of a man submitting to the domination of a woman is thus, according to the script, a 'conceptual anomaly', a 'self-contradictory impossibility' (Williams 1999: 137). What, then, are we to make of *Rhōmē/Roma*, a female whose name is 'Strength', as we have seen, and who is the very emblem of masculine *imperium*? What does it mean that *this* is the image of imperial Rome that the provinces choose to reflect back to the metropolis? What is actually being said here?

Like any complex image, needless to say, it admits of multiple interpretations. A female body overlaid with the trappings of Roman military discipline,²⁶ Roma may be read as the uncritical celebration of a masculinity that constructs itself through the unceasing suppression of femininity. As such, Roma may be read as a visual allegory of hegemonic Roman gender ideology. Roma's iconography may be interpreted to say—indeed, to repeat incessantly—that masculinity is the defeat of femininity. Roma's armor

25. To the extent that the constitutive other in this instance is Asian, these elite Roman authors can be said to be engaged in a proto-Orientalizing discourse. Cf. Said 1978. Said's primary focus is the modern discursive construction of 'the Orient' by the West. He identifies the cultural stereotype, however, as a key Orientalizing strategy (1978: 26, 152, 285, 321). Further on the ancient Roman stereotyping of Asians specifically, see Isaac 2006: 61-64, 70-72; cf. pp. 39-41.

26. Williams writes of 'that ultimate bulwark of Roman masculinity, military discipline...' (1999: 130). And again: 'Military discipline, pertinacity, endurance, and bravery in the face of death are all coded as masculine, and their absence as effeminate' (1999: 138; a substantiating quotation from Livy [5.6.4-5] follows). Skinner, for her part, remarks: 'Rome was a warrior society in which military prowess remained vital to the notion of masculinity even after the age of the citizen-soldier was long past' (2005: 208).

and weapons would then be designed not only to ward off the external threat, the threat from without, but also to ward off the internal threat, the threat from within. Roma would represent primal femininity perpetually in the process of mutating into masculinity. In the hegemonic Roman gender script, femininity is the given, the *a priori*, the default state, while masculinity is what must be achieved and maintained. It is the hard-won product of (self-)conquest. Thus interpreted, Rome's tutelary deity does more than guard the city of Rome and the provincial cities that belong to Rome; no less jealously, she guards the sex-gender ideology of Rome. Roman masculinity is brittle, beleaguered, besieged; it demands constant vigilance. Is this why Roma is regularly depicted in military garb? Is she—or, in essence, *he*—armed first and foremost against himself?

More subtle readings are, of course, possible. Roma, for centuries a resident of Asia before taking up her abode in the metropolis,²⁷ might also be read as a slavish representation of the 'proper' relations between Asian softness and Roman hardness: Roma is the overcoming of that softness through military discipline. Roma then would represent Asian internalization of, and acquiescence to, the ethnic stereotype. But interpretations less affirming of Roman superiority might also be ventured. Roma—female but not feminine, masculine but female—might be read as saying that the Roman ideology of masculinity is a self-contradictory and self-subverting impossibility. Or it might even be read as a satiric assertion that Roman masculinity is always threatening to shrivel back into the femininity on which it is erected, and which is always showing through its armor, Roma thus dismantling the hard/soft, Roman/Asian dichotomy on which the denigrating stereotype depends. And, of course, it might be read as saying all of these things at once, in a cacophonous self-contradictory babble. If Roma is always already positioned on the slippery slope that leads to Babel and, indeed, Babylon, then all that John of Revelation needs to do is give her a brisk shove. Which, as we are about to see, is precisely what he does.

Forced Prostitution

Roma receives rough treatment in Revelation. When we first encounter her, she has been stripped of her armor and decked out as a courtesan or prostitute: 'The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet and bedecked with gold, jewels and pearls, with a golden cup in her hand full of obscenities [*bdelygmatōn*] and the filth of her fornication [*ta akatharta tēs porneias autēs*]; and inscribed on her forehead was a mysterious name: "Babylon the Great, Mother of Whores and Earth's Obscenities [*hē mētēr tōn pornōn kai*

27. She did not acquire her first temple in the city of Rome until 137 CE (more on which below).

tōn bdelygmatōn tēs gēs]” (17.4-5).²⁸ To restate the argument of the previous section in slightly different terms, the goddess Roma is Roman imperial patriarchy paradoxically embodied as a woman in the trappings of an invincible warrior. In other words, Roma is hegemonic Roman manhood encased in female flesh that is clad in hypermasculine garb. To simplify, Roma is a man dressed as a woman dressed as a man. Babylon in the passage just quoted, then—Roma stripped of her military attire and reclothed as a prostitute—would be a man dressed as a woman dressed as a man dressed as a woman. In other words, Babylon would be Rome in triple drag.²⁹ It is high time we called in Judith Butler.

In what remains of this essay, Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990), the inadvertent charter document of queer theory,³⁰ will play a yet more inadvertent role: it will be read as commentary on the figure of Babylon in Revelation. *Gender Trouble* famously argues that gender identity is purely performative, the product of a compulsory set of stylized actions, which combine and conspire, through sheer repetition, to engender retroactively the illusion that gender is natural and innate, merely ‘expressed’ by the speech, gestures and other behaviors that in fact produce it (Butler 1990: 134-41).³¹ Famously,

28. Aune writes, ‘The description of the woman is drawn at least in part from the ancient courtesan *topos*.... Courtesans were used, particularly by moralist writers, as personifications of the vices....’ (1998: 935). The name on her forehead may be a tattoo: ‘The inscription on the forehead of this female figure suggests that... she is “a whore of the most degraded kind, a tattooed slave”’ (Aune 1998: 936, quoting Jones 1987: 151). In Juvenal and Tacitus, the spectacle of a sexualized woman utterly out of control likewise serves as a trope for imperial autocracy—absolute power exercised to excess, entirely without restraint. Note in particular Juvenal’s ‘astonishing fancy of Messalina the *meretrix Augusta* (“imperial whore”), creeping out at night to service customers in a brothel and returning to the palace reeking of sex but still unsatisfied’ (Skinner 2005: 242, citing Juvenal 6.115-32). See also Tacitus, *Annals* 11.1-4, 12, 26-38, along with Joshel 1997.

29. Here I am complicating Catherine Keller’s suggestive formulation: ‘we may behold the Whore of Babylon as a great “queen” indeed: imperial patriarchy in drag’ (1996: 77). More single-mindedly queer reading of Revelation has included Pippin 1999: 117-25; and Pippin and Clark 2006. See, in addition, Moore 1996: 117-38; Moore 2001: 173-99; Clark 1999; Frilingos 2004: 64-115; and Huber 2008: 3-28. For the intersection of queer studies and postcolonial studies/empire studies more generally, see Campbell 2000; Hawley 2001a; Hawley 2001b; Romanow 2006; and now, especially, Punt 2008.

30. In an interview Butler confessed: ‘I remember sitting next to someone at a dinner party, and he said that he was working on queer theory. And I said: What’s queer theory? He looked at me like I was crazy...’ (Butler with Osborne and Segal 1994: 32).

31. The theory undergoes incremental elaboration and refinement in Butler’s subsequent work, partly in response to criticism; see especially Butler 1993; her preface to the 1999 second edition of *Gender Trouble*; and Butler 2004.

too, the book singles out drag as illustrative and exemplary of gender performativity: 'The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed' (Butler 1990: 137). Drag thereby decouples gender from anatomical sex, and, thus decoupled, gender becomes a vertiginous performance. Butler quotes Esther Newton's *Mother Camp*, a text that partially anticipates her argument:

At its most complex, [drag] is a double inversion that says, 'appearance is an illusion'. Drag says 'my "outside" appearance is feminine, but my essence "inside" [the body] is masculine'. At the same time it symbolizes the opposite inversion; 'my appearance "outside" [my body, my gender] is masculine but my essence "inside" [myself] is feminine' (Newton 1971: 103, cited in Butler, 1990: 137; bracketed insertions are Butler's own).

All of which brings us back to Roma and Babylon. In effect, Roma is announcing: 'My outward appearance may be female but my inner essence is masculine. This I represent to you by adopting the attire not just of a man but of that most manly of men, a Roman warrior'. Revelation, however, replies to Roma and hence to Rome: 'Your adopted appearance may be masculine but your inner essence is feminine, indeed slavish. This I represent to you by stripping you of your masculine disguise and dressing you more fittingly, not just as a woman but as the epitome of fallen femininity. For inside you are nothing but a whore'.

If the goddess Roma, then, is the implicit embodiment of one particular answer to the question of how Rome obtained an empire—through sheer military superiority—the prostitute Babylon is the implicit embodiment of an altogether different answer. Paramount for Revelation—or so it would seem—is not Rome's military might but the seductiveness of her culture. Revelation's stance on Christian participation in the civic life of Roman Asia and accommodation to its cultural norms, not least those associated with the imperial cult, is sternly anti-assimilationist: 'Come out of her, my people...'—18.4 (Thompson 1990: 121-25, 174-75; Duff 2001: 61-70; Moore 2006: 115-18). This is why Rome—or, more precisely, Roma—is represented as a whore in Revelation: what better embodiment, for the sex-queasy seer, of repulsive seductiveness?

John himself is not immune to Rome's seductions, as it turns out. Paradoxically, however, it is not her civic culture that seduces him but rather her military might. Essentially, Revelation's messianic empire ('The world empire [*hē basileia tou kosmou*] has become the empire of our Lord and his Messiah'—11.15) will be established by the same means through which the Roman Empire was established: war and conquest, entailing, as always, mass-slaughter, but now on a surreal scale (6.4, 8; 8.11; 9.15, 18; 11.13; 14.20; 19.15, 17-21; 20.7-9, 15; see Moore 2006: 114-15, 118-21). All of which is to say that John is secretly in love with Roma, inaccessibly resplendent in her irresistible armored might, triumphantly enthroned upon

the mountain of war booty confiscated from the countless warriors she has slain. He loves her and hates her with equal passion. Which is why he deals so savagely with her.

As we saw, Roma is Rome in double drag: phallic masculinity masquerading as female flesh masquerading as hegemonic masculinity. And Babylon is Rome in triple drag: phallic masculinity figured as female and clothed as virtuous and victorious warrior, then reclothed as depraved and defeated prostitute. In Revelation, Roma is stripped of her hypermasculine attire and decked out as a whore. No longer the emblem of self-autonomy, she no longer belongs only to herself. No longer is her body a consummate instrument of control; now it is at the disposal of others. But this is only the first phase of Roma's two-stage ritual shaming in Revelation.

Roma is violently stripped of her manly garb and dressed as a prostitute—but only in order to be violently stripped once again, sexually shamed, and physically annihilated: 'they will loathe the whore, and they will ravage her and strip her naked, and they will devour her flesh and burn her with fire' (*houtoi misēsousin tēn pornēn, kai ērēmōnenēn poiēsousin autēn kai gymnēn, kai tas sarkas autēs phagontai kai autēn katakausousin en pyri*—17.16).³² '[G]ender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences', Butler remarks. '[W]e regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right' (1990: 140). For what, then, is Babylon being punished? For being a failed man, or a failed woman, or a fallen woman, or a man fallen into femininity? The more fundamental question might be, why are sex and gender contiguous with empire, or intimately associated with it, in Revelation in the first place? In other words, why are sex and gender metonymies of empire in this text? Roma is only part of the answer, as we are about to see.

Of what is Roman sex, as represented in the overwhelming majority of the extant literary sources, quintessentially expressive? *Of social hierarchy* is the answer resoundingly offered by classicists in recent decades (Moore 2001: 135–46). But what is the ultimate manifestation of social hierarchy in the Roman world? *The empire* would seem to be the answer (which is, of course, to say the Roman world itself; a tautologous answer, then, but accurate nonetheless). The Roman Empire would then be that to which Roman sex, at least as construed by elite Roman authors, ultimately gestures. It is probably no accident, therefore, that Revelation's denunciation of imperial Rome is simultaneously a denunciation of Roman sex and sensuality. But this double denunciation misses both of its marks, and for the same

32. Tina Pippin was the first to accord this troubling verse the attention it deserves (1992: 57–68). For my own attempt to extend her reflections, see Moore 2001: 182–84, 196–98. For a different but related extension of the Pippin trajectory, see Vander Stichele 2000. In contrast, see Schüssler Fiorenza 2007: 130–47, where she argues that the figuration of Rome as prostitute in Revelation is 'conventional' language that does not necessarily tell us anything about the author's perception of actual women.

reason each time. While overtly resisting the Roman Empire, John covertly replicates it, constructing an Empire of God on its model, as I have argued elsewhere (Moore 2006: 105-121). While overtly resisting the Roman sex/gender system, John also covertly replicates it, as I shall argue here.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler sought to decouple gender from anatomical sex—to deprive gender, both masculine and feminine, of its ‘natural’, ‘self-evident’ basis in anatomical sexual difference—in the conviction that such decoupling would call into question the construction of sex and gender in hierarchical binary terms, of ‘man’ over ‘woman’.³³ That such decoupling does not, however, lead inevitably to such interrogation³⁴ is suggested by the Book of Revelation, a particularly inflamed symptom, it seems to me, of the simultaneous rigidity and fluidity that appears to have characterized Roman sex/gender ideologies more generally.

First, the rigidity. Sexual violence in Revelation appears to be an affirmation of gender hierarchy. Aggression is turned inwards as well as outwards: outwards toward Roman civic culture, epitomized by the imperial cult; inwards toward rival Christian communities willing to accommodate to that culture. ‘Jezebel’ is the name for Christian assimilationism in Revelation (Duff 2001: 51-60), just as ‘Babylon’ is the name for what must not, under any circumstances, be assimilated, what must be rejected by being abjected. What this means is that inward-directed aggression in Revelation finds symbolic expression in imagined sexual violence directed against the female—that is to say, against Jezebel (‘...she doesn’t wish to repent of her fornication [*tēs porneias autēs*]. Behold, I am throwing her onto a bed [*ballō autēn eis klinēn*]...’—2.21-22)³⁵—just as outward-directed aggression also finds symbolic expression in imagined sexual violence directed against the female—that is to say, against Babylon (‘...they will loathe the whore, and they will ravage her and strip her naked...’—17.16). The female is everywhere the object of sexual violence in Revelation, then—except where she assumes the patriarchally pre-approved forms: virgin bride (19.6-8; 21.2, 9ff.) or self-sacrificing mother (12.1-6, 13-17).³⁶

33. ‘I asked, what configuration of power constructs... that binary relation between “men” and “women”, and the internal stability of those terms?’ (Butler 1990: viii).

34. A position from which Butler herself subsequently retreats. She writes, ‘there is no guarantee that exposing the naturalized status of heterosexuality will lead to its subversion’ (1993: 231).

35. The notion that the phrase ‘throw on a bed’ here is a Hebraism meaning ‘cause to become ill’ has been recycled by commentators since at least R.H. Charles (1920: I, 71-72), but punitive sexual violence seems implied by the fact that the bed in this instance is flanked by fornication on one side (‘...she doesn’t wish to repent of her fornication’) and adultery on the other (‘...and those who commit adultery with her...’). Cf. Duff 2001: 160 n. 17, 165 n. 53; Frilingos 2004: 109. Jezebel’s sexual shaming would then mirror that of Babylon in 17.16.

36. As numerous feminist commentators on the book have noted.

Now the rigidity with the fluidity. Danger in Revelation, as we have seen, is consistently figured as feminine—a ‘defiling otherness’, as Butler might say (1990: 133). The consolidation of the masculine through the exclusion of the feminine is a preoccupation of Revelation; consider the company of the redeemed: ‘These are they who have not defiled themselves with women [*meta gynaikōn ouk emolynthēsan*], for they are virgins’ (14.4). The derisive transmutation of masculinity into femininity is another preoccupation; look no farther than imperial Rome as ‘Babylon the Great, Mother of Whores’ (17.5). Gender in Revelation is at once utterly fluid and mobile and absolutely rigid and inflexible. It is fluid because masculinity and femininity are always in process, forever threatening to leak into each other. But it is rigid because masculinity is always flowing down from above the gender bar, transforming into femininity as it does so, while femininity is always flowing up from beneath the bar, becoming masculinity in the process. In other words, what is not explicitly called into question in Revelation is the hierarchical gender binary itself that sets masculinity over femininity, man over woman. But does the hierarchical opposition actually remain intact—can it possibly remain intact—in the midst of all this movement?

Paradoxically, it is in the representation of its protagonist, its hero, that Revelation troubles the gender binary most thoroughly. For what an unlikely leading man he turns out to be! In his first appearance in Revelation he comes replete with a pair of female breasts. ‘[G]irt about the paps with a golden girdle’ is how the King James translators rendered *periezōsmenon pros tois mastois zōnēn chrysan* (1.13). As it turns out, KJV better captures the sense of the verse than all of the contemporary translations that nervously cover up the breasts, turning them into a manly chest (Rainbow 2007).³⁷

If Rev. 1.12-16 is the epiphany of Jesus as celestial androgyn, however, Rev. 19.11-21 is his epiphany as celestial superwarrior. This gendered apotheosis is accomplished through violence on a spectacular scale (19.17-21). What manner of foe must be annihilated in order that the apotheosis be achieved? It is a foe that is simultaneously dehumanized, because bestialized—become *the Beast*, indeed—and feminized—become the ‘Mother of Whores’—to the extent that dehumanization and feminization can be cleanly distinguished within Revelation’s symbolic universe. One cannot say where the Beast ends and the woman, Babylon, begins. If *Thea Rhōmē* represents Rome as the attainment of phallic masculinity through the overcoming of

37. KJV inherited ‘paps’ from the Bishop’s Bible (1595) and Tyndale (1534), as Rainbow notes, and all three reflect the Vulgate’s *mamillas* (2007: 249 n. 1). Rainbow’s article argues that the Jesus of Rev. 1.13 owes his female breasts to those of the male lover of the Song of Songs (1.2 LXX: *mastoi sou*) on whom John has partially modeled him.

primal femininity (one possible interpretation of the Roma iconography, as we saw earlier), the Whore in combination with the Beast represents Rome as the collapse of masculinity back into the morass of femininity and animality.

‘The mark of gender appears to “qualify” bodies as human bodies’, writes Butler. ‘Those bodily figures who do not fit into either gender fall outside the human, indeed, constitute the domain of the dehumanized and the abject against which the human itself is constituted’ (1990: 111). Yet it is not only imperial Rome, Revelation’s villain, that is figured in terms that elide the distinction between the animal and the human. Revelation’s hero, its messianic protagonist, also slips in and out of gender as the narrative unfolds. ‘He’ blurs the boundaries not only between male and female, masculine and feminine, but also between human and animal; for if in his first epiphany in the book he comes with a pair of mammary glands, in his second epiphany he has become a four-footed mammal: ‘...a little lamb [*arnion*], standing as though it had been slaughtered, with seven horns and seven eyes...’ (5.6).³⁸ In the hyper-queered figure of Jesus in Revelation, all hierarchical binaries dissolve—not only male over female and masculine over feminine but even human over animal. They are digested in his ruminant, ovine stomach and leak as milk from his human, female breasts.

‘[G]ender is an “act”’, writes Butler, ‘that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism...’ (1990: 147). It is the enactment of gender in this self-subverting sense that we have been examining in the Book of Revelation. Revelation is a Roman book (Frilingos 2004: 78). As much as anything else, it is a Roman book on gender. But it is not a book on, or of, hegemonic Roman gender ideology in any pure or simple sense. Instead, Revelation is a limit-discourse of Roman gender. It is the self-deconstruction of Roman gender.

Epilogue

Elsewhere I have pondered the profound irony that, in the fourth century, Revelation’s Beast began to mutate into the one monstrosity that the seer seemed incapable of imagining: an empire that was Roman and Christian at one and the same time (Moore 2006: 119, 122). And what befell Dea Roma, so ill-used by John, even as Jesus became a new Romulus, the founder of a new Rome? The cult of Roma was a provincial creation, as we

38. For a suggestive gender analysis of the Lamb that traces its development in Revelation from initial femininity to ‘arrested masculinity’, see Frilingos 2004: 75–88. I am indebted to Frilingos for heightening my sense of the Lamb as a remarkable gender anomaly, although my own analysis follows a different path from his.

noted earlier. Provincial emperors were late in appearing, but two of them, Trajan and especially Hadrian, exhibited a special devotion to Dea Roma. It was Hadrian who was instrumental in installing her cult in the heart of the metropolis, in the Forum Romanum itself. Erection of the temple of Venus Felix and Roma Aeterna began in 121 CE and it was dedicated by Hadrian in 135. By all accounts, the temple was the largest and most magnificent that the city had ever seen, and it went on to become the most enduring of its pagan monuments. Under Hadrian and his successors, Dea Roma became the preeminent divinity of Roman state religion, even the imperial cult being subordinated to her worship (Mellor 1975: 201). As Roma Aeterna she remained the primary symbol of the Roman Empire even after the Constantinian turning point and the movement of effective government to Constantinople. She was adopted by Christianity and survived through the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, becoming the emblem of European civilization itself (Mellor 1975: 202).

Roma became Christian, then, even as Rome became Christianity. But although the former no less than the latter eventuality was one that the seer of Revelation could not have foreseen, the text that he authored seems to adumbrate this very development, all unbeknown to him. Revelation's messianic protagonist appears in anthropomorphic form at the beginning and again at the end of the text; otherwise he trots through the text as a lamb almost without interruption.³⁹ There are clear points of connection between Jesus' inaugural and climactic epiphanies, notably, the eyes like a flame of fire (1.14; 2.18; 19.12), the sharp sword issuing from his mouth (1.16; 2.12; 19.15), the rod of iron that is his to give (2.27) and with which he rules the nations (19.15), and the appellation 'faithful and true' (3.14; 19.11). Two other signal features of this singular being, however, are that he has female breasts, as we saw, and that he is an invincible warrior. He resembles the figure of Roma, in other words. So while one part of Revelation is busy shaming Roma by turning her into a prostitute, another part of Revelation is busy modeling Jesus on Roma.

Just as the figure of Roma may be read, as we saw, as the celebration of a masculinity that constructs itself through the incessant suppression of femininity, as suggested by Roma's own female physique encased in armor and surrounded by evidence of her incomparable military might, so too can the Jesus of Revelation be read as the celebration of a masculinity that constructs itself through the incessant suppression of femininity (those tell-tale breasts again)—and of animality. For the androgynous Jesus does not remain bipedal, as we noted. Before long he is walking on all fours, having slid over the edge of the Roman gender gradient altogether and plunged

39. He features as an infant in 12.5, 13, and, possibly, as 'one like a son of man' in 14.14-16, unless the latter figure is an angel (cf. 14.17-20).

beyond femininity into animality. As such, Revelation's Jesus, no less than Dea Roma, may be read as an allegory of hegemonic Roman gender ideology, one equally bristling with debilitating contradictions. Roma and John's Jesus are, to an extent, interchangeable figures. Which is why Roma is also capable of resurrection. She survives the ritual annihilation of the whore that John has attempted to turn her into ('they will ravage her and strip her naked, and they will devour her flesh and burn her with fire'—17.16) and walks off into the sunset of the Roman Empire, arm in arm with Jesus, become, like him, an emblem of Christian empire.

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CHALLENGING THE EMPIRE: THE CONSCIENCE OF THE PROPHET AND PROPHETIC DISSENT FROM A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

Hemchand Gossai

Arguably it is the case that biblical scholarship over the last 400 years or so has been shaped principally by the Reformation/Counter-Reformation and the Enlightenment. In large part what this has done is to emphasize the centrality of rationalistic thinking and, somewhat later, historical criticism. Indeed for a prolonged time these methods have been granted a privileged status, and in all of this time, while surrounded by the presence and influence of imperialism and colonialism, biblical scholars have been remarkably reluctant to employ other methods in shaping the trajectories of biblical hermeneutics.

There are two greater dangers within the field. One is an uncritical acceptance of the principal tenets of the discipline, and the other, its failure to relate it to the society in which its work is done. Biblical studies is still seduced by the modernistic notion of using the rational as a key to open the text and fails to accept intuition, sentiment and emotion as a way into the text. By and large the world of biblical interpretation is detached from the problems of the contemporary world and has become ineffectual because it has failed to challenge the status quo or work for any sort of social change.... Western theologians have yet to offer a sustained theological analysis of the impact of colonialism. [E.g.] colonialism has not received anything like as much attention as the Holocaust in recent theological reflection on the West (Sugitharajah 2006: 18-19).

I propose that a 'hermeneutic of prophetic dissent' is essential for challenging and countering any such positioning. Let me illustrate with a contemporary example.

On April 19, 1985, Elie Wiesel, Holocaust Survivor and Nobel Peace Laureate received the Congressional Medal of Achievement at the White House. Ronald Reagan was then the President of the United States. In the days surrounding the ceremony President Reagan found himself in a conflicted situation as to whether he should proceed on a planned trip to Bitburg cemetery, particularly after it was discovered that *Schutzstaffel* or SS soldiers were buried there. President Reagan decided to proceed with his

trip as planned. Wiesel, on this public occasion at the White House, spoke directly to President Reagan.

Allow me Mr President to touch on a matter which is sensitive. I belong to a traumatized generation; to us symbols are important. Following our ancient tradition which commands us to 'speak truth to power', may I speak to you of the recent events that have caused so much pain and anguish?

We have met four or five times. I know of your commitment to humanity. I am convinced that you were not aware of the presence of SS graves in the Bitburg cemetery. But now we all are aware of that presence. I therefore implore you Mr President in the spirit of this moment that... you will not go there. That place is not your place (1990: 176).

Like Wiesel, Micaiah is not with the king for an informal conversation; in fact, the agenda is formal and precise. What is spoken will not be 'behind closed doors'. This is public. To further intensify the formal occasion, the physical setting with all the grandeur in 1 Kings 22 is described at great length. Like the White House, the King's Court is a place of power and authority. Micaiah is put to the test. There are moments when one might speak the truth in a neutral or private setting but not here, as Wiesel chose not to speak privately with the President. When truth is to be told that challenges the state and the considerable power of the office, it cannot be a private transaction but a public pronouncement. Analogues are hardly perfect and surely the one used here is no exception, but we witness a quality of courage to speak the truth in the face of daunting possibilities. Howsoever one views this, finally there is a palpable element of vulnerability for the one who challenges the source of power.

As a world we should not be surprized that moments of war, some of which have lingered on for a hundred years, have punctuated the landscape of world history. It is a tragic commentary that often, though by no means always, we have come to think of war as giving identity and definition to many generations. Presently, several countries in the world are involved in wars and still others employ the rhetoric of war in political discourse and engagement. We have had recent evidence in the United States where wondering and questioning are viewed by some as undermining the direction of the state; some even view these fundamental human principles as subversive. Yet, in such extraordinary circumstances, how can there not be questions? Biblical narratives and histories remind us that one is propelled into war for a variety of reasons, and in fact a leader of the state might even seek 'divine assent' to justify wars. In this paper I propose that we reflect on 1 Kings 22, a narrative that remains remarkably relevant and pointed in its implications.

As one example of the fundamental nature of the relationship between the Hebrew prophets and various political, religious, and judicial institutions of their day, this paper explores the interface of two seemingly

unequal powers, that of the prophet as a solitary figure over against the power of the state, most notably vested in the person of the King Ahab in 1 Kings 22. While the power of the state depends arguably on its military, it also depends on the voice of the majority who subscribe to a broad imperial role of government. However, a prophet outside the circle of 'assenters' may seek to redefine 'power' and reassert an indispensable role for the 'voice of conscience'. This paper engages the particularity of this biblical text with contemporary neo-imperial powers and their approaches to nations and peoples.

The Twists and Turns

In matters of truth and the moral conscience of the prophet, there is no retreat. Punishment in the form of imprisonment and meager rations will be meted out to Micaiah, but the prophet is unflinching in his commitment. In speaking the truth Micaiah will do so at considerable cost, like every other prophet who speaks the truth, as was the case also with Amos and Jeremiah among others. The prophetic truth must be spoken and, once spoken, there is no going back.

Prevalent and pervasive in the books of the Hebrew prophets are the wide-ranging issues and occurrences against which the prophets spoke. The invectives they pronounce against have variations that are not only present today, but also in many circumstances either tolerated or even embraced or woven into the fabric of our society. There are different layers of conflict that permeate 1 Kings 22: nation against nation, prophet against prophet, monarchical power against divine power, among others. There are hence multiple conflicts of interest. The voices of power resounding out of the halls of power do not necessarily echo the voice of God. Each of these tensions exists independently and yet they intersect in significant ways. Additionally and worthy of note is that of the pervasive tension between truth and lies. There are numerous surprising revelations regarding those who seek the truth, those who tell the truth, and those involved in deceit and lies. Micaiah insists that he must speak the truth (22.14) and then immediately proceeds to do otherwise (22.15). Ahab, on the other hand, does not want to hear the truth; or, rather, he wants to hear *his* truth—truth based on what he has already determined. Part of the complexity here is that Ahab, the king, insists on the truth, when in fact he really only wants confirmation for his decision to enter into war. Thus what he insists on publicly is not what he wants to hear. The king wants the truth—in public—for this is what the public must hear and believe. But this drama is doubly disingenuous for the king finally is not only *not* interested in the truth but also sees truth as a mere tool to be navigated around, negotiated away, manipulated with, and, finally, a casualty to be

destroyed if necessary. The king simply cannot have a prophetic challenge to his authority. Even the ‘propping up’ of Ahab at the end of the narrative is a deception in order to perpetuate the truth of the power of the state. To the degree that Ahab is the principal representative of state power, then the power is sustained only by a lie, until the truth is known—for even the state can only feign death for so long. Ahab’s war is ill conceived and unwise, and, yet, God will use it to destroy the king.

The Context

Ahab seeks a partnership with Judah and its king, Jehoshaphat. As new alliances between Judah and Israel are made, old ones disintegrate, and a former peace partner, Aram, becomes the adversary. Jehoshaphat immediately, indeed without any intervening question, decides that his military force may be at Ahab’s disposal (22.3-4). Ahab’s coalition with Jehoshaphat certainly brings about the desired alliance, but it also leads to an unexpected and compelling request by the latter. Jehoshaphat does not engage with the king of Israel about the reason for the sudden interest in or argument for war, but solely hinges the matter on whether this war may be God’s intent: ‘Inquire first for the word of the Lord’ insists Jehoshaphat (22.5). Having YHWH as the covenant God of Israel and Judah is not enough to enter into war against an enemy. Jehoshaphat does not trust the ‘truth’ of Ahab’s four hundred prophets; God will not simply sanction state power. Jehoshaphat knows that in matters of truth, neither the voice of the majority nor the voice of power will suffice.

While imperial power has structural support, prophetic power is invariably embodied in a voice outside the center. Jehoshaphat seeks to do the right thing, and ascertain what God desires, for he knows that in both national and international matters, God is the central player and it is God’s word which will constitute the ultimate dictate. What is the divine purpose at this point, and importantly, who might speak on behalf of God? Can the voice of the imperial power also be the voice of God? Can the political establishment speak on behalf of God? Is the voice of God simply meant to sanction what has already been decided? Then and now, discerning and determining who speaks on behalf of God has been a point of dissention.

Ahab is not only willing to go to war, but also eager to do so. The pace is only slowed down by the engagement of a prophet in the margin and the ensuing conflict between Ahab and Micaiah. We have a seemingly promethean struggle between the king, the imperial force with the support of the structure of government, and the prophet who functions without structure or institution. The one who initially causes the pace to slow down is the one coalition partner, Jehoshaphat.

The Pretext

As devastating as the call to war is, the narrative renders it as a critical point of departure for something even greater and more urgently challenging. Among other trajectories within the text, a tension of great magnitude looms between imperial power and prophetic power.

When the king of Israel is asked to inquire of God, the immediate response is to ask those who are employed by the king. The guild of prophets is clearly in the king's employment, and it is evident that their role is not to speak on behalf of God but on behalf of the king. At least, this is what Ahab believes on the basis of the convention. As we discover, this is not the case and neither Ahab nor his four hundred prophets are aware of this. The manner in which the question is asked makes it clear where the focus is. Not unlike poll questions, this one too is designed to elicit a particular answer. They assure the king, unanimously, in one voice that going to war is a good idea and that indeed God will deliver Ramoth-gilead into Ahab's hands. They are no qualifications and no stipulations. Go to war, and the city will be yours. Such is the immediate and uncritical response. They do not ponder; they do not take it to God and wonder. They simply provide the answer that the king is seeking. Thus, in this instance, the prophetic voice is collapsed under the force of imperial power. Four hundred advocated in the war room in unison, 'Go up, go up, go up'. Ahab determines what he will do and places restrictions on a future that is supposed to be divinely shaped and guided. Listening to the report of Ahab's four hundred prophets, Jehoshaphat knows instinctively that all is not well. Certainly this kind of hasty unanimity cannot be the voice of God and so Jehoshaphat asks if another prophet might be available (Crenshaw 1971; DeVries 1978). What he seeks is one who does not appear to be a surrogate of the state. There is an ongoing intrigue, tension, or conflict between truth and the labyrinth of lies in this story.

This is the point at which Micaiah ben Imlah enters the scenario (Robertson 1982). The king of Israel knows Micaiah, and it is clear that he intentionally seeks to keep his voice silent. If there is something positive to be said about the king of Israel, it is that he does not hide the reason behind his deep disdain for this prophet: 'I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favorable about me, but only disaster' (22.8). Ahab knows that Micaiah is fearless in telling the truth and thus he dislikes him. Imperial power dislikes and seeks to dismiss prophetic power.

One should certainly not confuse Micaiah the prophet as the 'enemy of the state', though perhaps Ahab would like to identify him as such. In fact, Ahab deems him to be so even before Micaiah makes any pronouncements. Let me note that Micaiah's prophecy regarding Ahab's fate (22.19-23) does not in any way reflect a condemnation of the people (22.17). It is true that as the king, Ahab is a 'corporate personality', but as Nelson explains, 'the

fate of the people is separate from that of the monarch, the leader' (1987: 150). As we have mentioned, we are told from the beginning by Ahab that he hates Micaiah. Whatever Micaiah's earlier prophecies might have been, Ahab's hatred against Micaiah appears to be personal and not involve the people of the nation. Even though there is no biblical record, it is indisputably clear that Ahab and Micaiah had a prior relationship—a tempestuous one from all accounts that existed before the recorded encounter we find in 1 Kings 22. Given what we have in the narrative, Ahab and Micaiah must have had several previous encounters, and Ahab's animosity against Micaiah has intensified. Had it not been for Jehoshaphat's inquiry, Ahab would definitely not have mentioned Micaiah (22.7-8). In fact, since Jehoshaphat seems to be unaware of Micaiah, one is left to wonder why Ahab mentions this particular prophet. Here again, Ahab's interest in 'truth' surfaces and the question about what 'truth' means for him emerges. The reason why Ahab would make Micaiah known is something of a mystery. Ahab might have felt compelled to speak the truth despite his personal disinclination. The prophet's pronouncements will not be determined by whether he is liked or disliked by Ahab, or whether Ahab believes that he would, literally from the Hebrew, 'prophesy good'. Indeed by whose standard is 'good' defined? What does it mean for the prophet to prophesy 'good'? From Ahab's perspective, 'good' is equated with agreement with him. 'Good' for Ahab is the sustaining and sanctioning of monarchical power. The king's personal inclination, disinclination—or for that matter, personal animosity—cannot be the ultimate guiding principle for prophetic pronouncement.

The Test and the Contest

While the kings sit on their thrones arrayed in their royal robes, with the guild of prophets telling them what Ahab wishes to hear, a messenger is sent to Micaiah to seek his prophecy regarding the war that is about to be waged. But the reality is that the messenger has no intention to elicit a genuinely prophetic word from Micaiah. Zedekiah, clearly a 'yes man' for the king, even symbolically displays a horn to gore Aram (22.11). The imperial power seeks approval, but prophetic power cannot be collapsed under such pressure. The imperial prophets have spoken with one accord, and this is the pressure that is levied against Micaiah. The messenger does not even formally ask Micaiah to seek God's word; Micaiah is simply told what the imperial majority has pronounced and what he should likewise do (22.13). When the messenger approaches Micaiah there is an unabashed 'arm twisting', and the message is perfectly scripted.

Preparations for war, in both theatre and rhetoric, are well underway with the machinery of the state. It is a shocking realization that the king has no intention to hear what the word of God is, for he has already determined

what he will do. Moberly suggests: 'To challenge the complacencies and self deceptions of the human heart and mind with the searching truth of God will regularly provoke a hostility whose consequences may be devastating. To try to avoid this by being more accommodating risks becoming a prophet whose message is ultimately self serving' (2003: 15). Micaiah's initial response is exactly as one would expect. 'As the Lord lives, whatever the Lord says to me, that I will speak' (22.14).

Yet, when Micaiah comes before the king, his word is exactly as the other prophets have spoken (22.15). We have this peculiar situation of knowing that Micaiah will speak the truth, and, yet, in the face of imperial power, he says what the king wishes to hear. To simply agree as he does initially is immediately seen through for its hypocrisy; even Ahab, who seeks Micaiah's approval, sees this (22.16).

Contrary to his imperial trappings, the king of Israel knows that Micaiah's initial word is not true, and he seeks 'the truth' despite himself. But Micaiah's response is instructive. Even Micaiah shrinks in the face of imperial power, and one should not imagine that prophetic testimony is oblivious to the power of the state. Micaiah is aware of the danger, and his initial response demonstrates self-preservation. The narrative leading up to this point has made it altogether clear that Ahab and Queen Jezebel are utterly unscrupulous and violent (1 Kgs 16–21). Micaiah's initial response is understandable.

History has shown that when a king's desire is challenged and confronted even in the name of God, the king will often resort to violence. Micaiah has good reasons to be reluctant, and yet he must speak the truth. There is nothing that Micaiah is able to say that will align him with the king. The voice of the prophet is not the voice of the state, and Micaiah turns out to be, in Ahab's eyes, an enemy of the state. Yet, this enemy of the state is the one who speaks on behalf of God.

So the quest for truth is made public, but when the truth comes, the one who bears it must be silenced. Micaiah is placed in detention (22.26–28). In prison, he is given 'prisoner food'. The idea is that by imprisoning and demoralizing Micaiah, the word that he speaks will be discounted or even likely silenced. The larger issue is, of course, not simply the feud between the prophet and the state, but the act to silence God. Ahab's belief is that in silencing the prophet, the prophetic oracle will also recede if not disappear. One thinks of Solzhenitsyn and Havel, both of whom have written so remarkably and poignantly about such silencing. Moreover, as we see in contemporary society, when there is disagreement with those who bring a prophetic voice, the powers that be will vilify and ostracize them and often call them 'crazy'. Perhaps in doing so, the general public will believe that the prophetic word has been weakened. One is reminded here that an associate of Elisha is also called 'mad' by the establishment because of his prophetic words (2 Kgs 9.1–11).

The Costs

Ahab cannot claim by any measure that he does not know the truth, for in fact he *does* know the truth. He insists on being told the truth, but really has no discernible interest in the truth. It is instructive that while Ahab does not seem to insist on the truth of his four hundred prophets, when Micaiah tells him the truth, he nonetheless proceeds as if he has not heard anything new or different from his four hundred prophets (22.26-29).

Ahab wants a war and a war he will have. But as in all wars, there are vagaries over which a leader may not have any control. It is true that the declaration of war is the prerogative of the leader of a nation; advisory or legislative bodies may suggest, opine, debate, or vote, but finally the leader decides. A nation or a people may be given particular or general reasons for a war or talk of war, but, in the case of Ahab, there is no reason given and it is entirely his decision. As Ahab tries to anticipate the outcome, what is unknown is not Yahweh's plan to use the war for Ahab's final demise but exactly how this will come about. No war comes without a price, and if the only casualty in the military undertaking is the life of Ahab, then perhaps one may argue that this is justifiable. However, the death of Ahab will not be the only cost; the often overlooked or neglected cost is the peace that has been existing between the countries. Certainly, given the history between Aram and Israel, one may be led to believe that peace is tenuous; nonetheless, the countries have been enjoying peace for three years at this point.

Why is this Ramoth-gilead so important that peace between the nations must be sacrificed? The narrator of this text deems it significant enough to mention that these nations coexisted peaceably for a duration of three years. This, I would argue, is more than passing in importance, and certainly not to be construed as incidental. Assuming that the narrative only includes materials that are relevant for a story, then it is incumbent upon readers to ponder on the significance of such a reference. Ahab's insistence on regaining the disputed territory means that peace is sacrificed and becomes a casualty. This is not a trifling feat as Israel and Aram (Syria) seemed to be constantly at war. This lengthy narrative follows on the heels of an alliance between Aram and Israel, as together they held off the powerful imperial army of Assyria.

One might legitimately argue that the very act of war, particularly when there is peace between the nations, creates fear, pain, and suffering for the citizens of the respective nations. Whatever has been the history between Aram and Israel, what we know is that the people are in a peaceful existence with each other when Ahab makes his decision to go to war. There is no textual indication or inference that there is a royal envoy from Ahab to the King of Aram, or any conversations or negotiations between them.

When nations are adversaries, diplomacy and conversations are important. Here peace actually exists, and this alone would be a good reason for diplomacy. But none of these principles appear to matter to Ahab and perhaps a surprise attack is his guiding principle. What causes the change from a peaceful relationship to one of war seems to be the decision by Ahab to recapture the disputed territory of Ramoth-gilead, and we do not even know why Ramoth-gilead is so important for Israel's national identity. Moberly suggests that the juxtaposition of Ramoth-gilead and Naboth's vineyard, both involving Ahab and land acquisition, might indicate an abuse of power (2003: 4). The pursuit and conquest of territory in both instances do not suggest any particular benefit besides the building of political power and capital. Ahab decides on a war because of this disputed territory, and Israelite, Judahite, and Aramean blood will all stain the land before it is all over.

The Outcome

When Micaiah outlines his vision and speaks of a scattering, a people without a king, and a society that will collapse into chaos, he is imprisoned and physically weakened (22.19-27). Despite what Micaiah pronounces, Jehoshaphat maintains his alliance with Ahab and follows him into war. When he receives the truth that he too seeks and perhaps may have even believed, it still does not matter, he follows Ahab anyway (22.29). But we know that Jehoshaphat does have a vision that contains a striking and dramatic promise that God will in fact use the war for the death of Ahab (22.28; see also Bodner 2003). Not only will the policy of Ahab not succeed, but death will also come to Ahab because of his unwise pursuit of war. What we have is a clash of two foreign policies: Ahab's and God's. Shalom is beyond Ahab. Ultimately, his warring intent will lead to his death, for he has been enticed, seduced, and, finally, blinded by his own military machinations. His pursuit for war is not predicated on any kind of genuine discussion or listening, as territorial dispute has expanded itself into the realm of certitude regarding ownership and belonging.

We are not surprised, given the track record of Ahab, that Micaiah is imprisoned for his words. The king has the power to silence, in the hopes of undermining, even unraveling the truth. In the face of challenges, the state seeks to silence the voice of the critics and those who pose an alternative. Yet, even as Micaiah is silenced, his vision not only lives on but it is also directed by God (Hamilton 1994; Roberts 1988). In a striking juxtaposition of two powers, both state and God prepare for war. While Ahab imagines and anticipates, God already knows the outcome. This war will ultimately not be about the disputed land of Ramoth-gilead or Israel versus Aram but about Ahab. He realizes this as he disguises himself as a peasant soldier (22.30). But disguise and change in appearance will not do, for this war is

out of his hands but in God's hands. Ahab's fate has been sealed. The war which he himself initiated would lead to his death, and there is nothing to stem the tide of his demise.

Conclusion

In the United States, patriotism is narrowly construed and understood as lending support to state-sanctioned positions, so voices that challenge the state are deemed unpatriotic, often silenced, and frequently demonized. Micaiah's pronouncement establishes with unencumbered clarity that state ideology, as powerful as it may be and as widely as it is embraced by state operatives, must not be confused with divine affirmation.

We know that with all the planning of the state, its military alliances, political maneuvering, and even the rhetoric of peace through war, none of it will ultimately have the final word. As the narrative of 1 Kings 22 comes to an end, there is an enduring message. The destiny of a people which is often viewed as tied to its leader is not necessarily so. In the case of Israel, the leader dies and the people return home in peace. The alignment of God with the goals of the state cannot be assumed, and there are moments when God will protect the people from their leaders. The people will survive in peace despite an ideology of war.

At the end, Ahab is wounded by accident, and dies in the process of a "lie" as he is being propped up in his chariot (22.31-35). The irony is that he is being overlooked as the king and yet he is killed. The tensions and layers in the narrative are multiple, but within it is the ever present question: Who will speak for God?

The four hundred prophets claim to speak for God, but in reality, they represent a thinly veiled collective mouthpiece for the king, even as they are used by God. The voice of the true prophet who speaks on God's behalf needs not be measured quantitatively or by decibels, but by truth that may be quiet but devastating. God will use whatever measures, whether a truth-speaking prophet or lying spirits to bring about the demise of a warmonger like Ahab. God's 'lying spirits' work, while Ahab's 'lying' through his disguise does not. He dies, despite himself. In both 'truth' and 'lie', Ahab is outdone by God.

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RESISTANCE VERSUS ACCOMMODATION: WHAT TO DO WITH ROMANS 13?

Roland Boer

In Romans 13.1 Paul writes, ‘Let every person be subject to the governing authorities... anyone who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed’. This text and the few verses that follow it have raised the pulse of more than one rebel, revolutionary or even postcolonial critic, while at the same time warming the heart of not a few conservatives and other despots and megalomaniacs. Romans 13.1-7 is the starting point for my essay, for it raises an acute problem: for every text of resistance and liberation, we can also find at least one of accommodation and oppression. My exploration of this problem has three stages: I begin with the questions Romans 13 poses for those readings that interpret the New Testament as an anti-imperial and anti-colonial collection of texts. From there I widen my scope to consider the full run of political ambivalences and contradictions in Paul’s letters. I close by asking what we can do with these contradictions. Over against the tendency to seek idealistic solutions to what are idealistic problems, I suggest a more materialist position in which Paul’s contradictions are signals of deeper socio-economic ones.

Anti- or Pro-Empire?

It is difficult to avoid the sense of Paul’s exhortation in Romans 13. ‘Let every person (*pasa psychē*) be subject (*hupotassesthō*) to the governing authorities (*exousiais huperechousais*)’ is quite clear: all of us must subordinate ourselves to those with power, authority, dominion and what have you. Three points are worth noting in these verses: a hierarchy of power; a concern with insurrection; and taxes. I will leave taxes alone (13.6-7), since the point flows on from the other two. As far as hierarchy is concerned, what runs through Paul’s text is a chain of command (see 13.1b): God first, who bestows power and authority upon designated rulers, and then all the rest who must obey them. Here Paul seems to be referring to earthly rulers, but the same hierarchy applies to the spirit world (1 Cor. 15.24). Now emerges the concern with sedition. This is really the main focus of this text, covering four of its seven verses. And it turns on a play with *tassō*. Originally

designating the proper ordering of troops, *tassō* has come to mean the correct arrangement and order, the determined sequence of things. So Paul points out that authority has been ordered (*tetagmenai*, 13.1) by God and it requires one to 'be subordinate' (*hupotassesthō*, 13.1, 5) to that authority. However, what one must not do is undermine or go against that order (*antitassō*), or more strictly be a disruptor of order or 'a rebel' (*ho antitassomenos*, 13.2). In other words, Paul is all too keen to counter any possibility of civil disobedience, sedition and insurrection. Woe to the 'one who resists the authorities' (*ho antitassomenos tēi exousiai*, 13.2), he writes, for the wrath, judgment, terror, punishment and sword of the ruler and thereby of God will soon follow (13.2-5). Be afraid, be very afraid if you engage in such evil acts. I can't help wondering why Paul is so keen to frighten his readers into obedience, into 'good conduct' in order to gain the authority's approval (*epainon ex autēs*; 13.3). I suspect it is because he or those who took up his message saw the radical possibilities and it frightened the hell out of him, but more of that later.

More than one conservative or reactionary has found a text such as Romans 13 extraordinarily useful. To cull a few more notable examples from a very long list, there is the dirty deal done with the state under Constantine and the resultant effort at 'catholic orthodoxy'; the 'holy' Roman emperors who followed through the Middle Ages; the uncanny ability of monarchs to be, as Christ's representative on earth, both head of state and of the church; the class status of the Church throughout feudalism; Luther calling on everyone and anyone to slaughter any rebel peasant they might encounter; the *sine qua non* of deep religious commitment by as many presidents of the United States as one cares to remember; and the groveling support of wealthy and powerful rulers by any number of ecclesiastical bodies.

Romans 13 was not the only text called upon to justify such reactionary readings. For instance, John Calvin added to this flagship text Tit. 3.1 on obeying the powers, principalities and magistrates, 1 Pet. 2.13 on submission to kings and governors, and 1 Tim. 2.1-2 on prayers and intercessions for all in authority (*Inst.* 4.20.23; *OS* 5.494.6-26).¹ As I have argued elsewhere, Calvin gets himself into a massive knot, since he is too perceptive a student of the Bible not to see that there are a good many texts that advocate

1. Stevenson (1999: 143-44; 2004) heavily stresses this element in Calvin's political thought, drawing on letters that give direct advice on the matter. See also the commentaries on 1 Pet. 2.13 (Calvin 1855: 79-80), 1 Tim. 2.1-2 (Calvin 1856: 51-53), and Tit. 3.1 (Calvin 1856: 324). I follow the standard practice of referencing Calvin's works. While *Inst.* obviously refers to the English translation of *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with section, chapter and paragraph numbers, *OS* refers to the Latin edition by Barthes and Niesel (Calvin 1957 [1559]), with the references to volume, page and line numbers.

the overthrow of an ungodly ruler, a position he ends up advocating (see Boer 2009).

I will come back to this tension in a moment, but before I do I want to juxtapose Romans 13 with the positions taken by those who approach the New Testament from the perspective of 'empire' and post-colonial criticism. One may be forgiven for thinking that every second book or article published in the last few years on the New Testament has 'empire' somewhere in the title (Horsley 2000; 2002; 2003; Carter 2001; 2006; Elliott 1997; 2000; 2008; Brett 2008). What is striking about these texts is that they seek not merely to situate the New Testament within the Roman Empire—a somewhat obvious point—as a response to the earlier emphasis on its deeply Jewish nature, but they also argue that these texts are deeply anti-imperial documents. Or at least one can find, they argue, a consistent anti-imperial theme running through them. Invariably the comparison is made with our own times, whether it the imperialism of the United States or the global ravages of trans-national corporations or the profound difference between the majority of impoverished peoples of the world and a small number of the obscenely rich.

It is a long way from Romans 13, so let us see what some of them make of that text.² Most of the positions fall into standard patterns of interpretation, although all of them share the assumption that at some level Paul must be consistent and coherent. Although some have toyed with the idea that Rom. 13.1-7 is, without any evidence, an interpolation (Kallas 1965), most fall back on the tried and not-so-true position that the text is a particular injunction limited to a specific time and place (as a small sample among many, see Käsemann 1980: 338-47; Elliott 2008: 154; Tellbe 2001: 171; Ehrensperger 2007: 173-74; Carter 2006: 133-36). This argument has all manner of variations, such as a temporal one in which Paul advocated submission while the Romans seemed all powerful and resistance would have meant immediate annihilation (Ehrensperger), or that he took up a standard theme and repeated it without reflecting too much (Käsemann), or that he distinguishes between being forced to obey and willingly doing so (Carter and Ehrensperger). The catch is that this position turns on a deeply theological and problematic distinction between universal and particular admonitions. One cannot help notice that it is more popular when there is a rather bad example of government in mind—the Nazis for German critics or the United States for American critics. A less popular and indefensible line is to argue that Paul is being ironic, offering a subtle critique of Roman power (Jewett 2007: 787-89; and an earlier moment for Carter 2004). Over against these various twists and turns, the very non-postcolonial Voelz (1999)

2. This is a heavily interpreted text, as one would expect. See the survey of positions in Tellbe 2001: 177-78; and especially Riekinen 1980.

actually offers a novel argument: the text is perfectly clear but it refers only to good governments—he explicitly mentions Nazi Germany. No one, however, countenances the possibility that Paul may be thoroughly inconsistent and incoherent. Or not quite, for Elliott (2008: 156; 1997) argues that Paul does show signs of strain since he was under the influence of imperial ideological forces that produced ripples and disjunctions in his letters. In other words, Elliott recognizes a contradiction or two in Paul's texts, contradictions that arise from the 'material and ideological conditions in which the letter was written and which the letter was an attempt to resolve' (2008: 156). Yet Elliott still won't countenance that Paul himself was inconsistent and he does not investigate what those material conditions might be. I want to suggest that Paul is thoroughly contradictory and that his incoherence is a result of his socio-economic situation.

Ambivalence

We have arrived at the point where anti-imperial readings run up against and struggle with texts like Romans 13, offering what are usually old exegetical responses. Barring Elliott's limited recognition, none of these approaches countenance the possibility that Paul may have been openly ambivalent on this matter, that there is a basic and irresolvable opposition in his thought. It should actually be no surprise that there is a tension or two in Paul's thought since his whole theoretical framework turns on them. Yet the assumption is that Paul has managed to work through them or overcome them. The trick for interpreters who assume that Paul must be coherent is to figure out how he does so, for it is not always so clear. In this section, then, I explore those oppositions and tensions further.³

Paul's letters are riddled with tensions: Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 2.8-10; 3.9, 29; 9.24; 10.12; 1 Cor. 1.23; Gal. 2), slave and free (Rom. 6; 1 Cor. 7.20-2; 12.13; Gal. 3.28), male and female (Gal. 3.28), flesh and spirit (Rom. 7.1; 1 Cor. 6.16; 15.39, 50; Gal. 6.13; Phil. 3.1-4), elect and damned (Rom. 9.11; 11.7, 28), Adam and Christ (Rom. 5.11-13, 16-18; 1 Cor. 15.22), death and life (Rom. 5-6; 7.10; 8.2, 6, 38; 2 Cor. 2.16; 2 Cor. 4.10-12; Phil. 1.20), grace and law (Rom. 4.16; 5.20; 6.14-15; Gal. 2.21; 3.18; 5.4), grace and sin (Rom. 5.20-1; 6.1, 14-15), grace and works (Rom. 11.6), Christ and law (Rom. 7.4, 25; 8.2; 10.4; 1 Cor. 9.21; Gal. 2.16, 21; 3.1, 13, 24; 5.4; 6.2; Phil. 3.9), Christ and sin (Rom. 5.21; 6.1; 9, 11, 23; 7.25; 8.2, 9-10; 13.14;

3. I am not the first to point out that the New Testament is a treacherous and highly ambivalent terrain if one wishes to find a clear anti-imperial message. See Stephen Moore's thorough discussions of Mark, John and the Apocalypse, where he focuses on their political ambiguity, albeit without offering any reasons for it (2006). On Mark see also Liew 1999.

1 Cor. 8.12; 15.3, 17; 2 Cor. 5.19; Gal. 2.17; 3.22; 5.14), righteousness through faith or works (Rom. 1.17; 3.21-2; 4; 9.13; 10.6; Gal. 3.11; 5.5; Phlm 3.9), law of sin and law of Christ (Rom. 7.25; 8.2). This list should dispel any doubts as to how consistent these oppositions are.

Now, Paul tackles these oppositions in different ways. Sometimes one side receives his approving nod and the other side not (it is not too difficult to sort these out). At other times he mixes and matches: Christ and grace are pivots for many of the terms Paul values, so we can line up Christ and/or grace with redemption, life, faith and oppose them to sin, law, death, works and so on.⁴ And at other times he mentions an opposition in order to point out that it no longer applies in light of Christ (e.g. the famous male and female, slave and free, Jew and Gentile of Galatians 3.28). At others the opposition becomes the basis of further complication, undermining and rearranging, such as the reshaping of law versus grace in terms of the law of Christ versus the law of sin, or the jumbling of flesh and spirit in light of the body and in terms of death and life.

Rather than go through all of these oppositions in detail, let me focus on the most famous of all, that between law and grace, which is usually coupled with faith and works. Romans and Galatians throw out sentences such as: 'you are not under law but under grace (*charin*)' (Rom. 6.14); 'a man is not justified (*diakaioutai*) by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ' (Gal. 2.16); 'For we hold that a man is justified (*dikaiousthai*) by faith apart from works of the law' (Rom. 3.28). The problem with these statements is that they have and do run in a number of directions, such as Calvinist predestination (since we are completely reliant on God's grace we are also reliant on God's decisions as to who will be saved and who damned), the Methodist tendency to Arminianism (God's grace is available to all but we can accept or reject it), license (if we are of the Elect then nothing we do will change that), Puritanism (in response to grace we need to live lives acceptable to God), quietism (it is all up to God), activism (showing the fruits of grace) and political radicalism (grace is after all the theological version of revolution).

I have run ahead of myself, so let me go back to Paul. While Paul asserted freedom from the law because of grace, some of the groups that grew up around these letters took the idea much further than he anticipated, pushing Christian freedom from the law into all manner of directions such as freedom in regard to sex, worship, Roman law and so on. As some of the classic studies of the Corinthian and Galatian correspondence have argued,

4. At this point we could extend this mixing in a way that would reveal some of Paul's more problematic assumptions. For example, what do the reshuffled oppositions of elect versus female, or law versus spirit, or indeed Jews versus life say about Paul's own deeper patterns of thought?

Paul seems to be putting out fires for which he himself was initially responsible (Longenecker 1990; Martyn 2004; Matera 2007; Martin 1995; Thiselton 2000; Keener 2005 and Fitzmyer 2008).⁵ While the Galatians erred on the side of sticking with the law, the Corinthians pursued Paul's arguments far further than he was willing to countenance. So we find the libertine response: if the law has been overcome, then it is no longer relevant for us. Alternatively, if our sins have been forgiven once and for all, then it matters not what we do. Or in an apocalyptic vein: since Christ has inaugurated the last days, the old world has passed and has no hold on us now.

Once these various readings became clear to Paul he realized with a shock what in the hell he had let loose. The push towards Christian freedom that appears in the letter to the Galatians runs into the mud in the Corinthian correspondence. To his own chagrin, these developments could claim a logical beginning within his own thought. So we find him trying to rope in what has taken off, setting boundaries on what grace, faith and freedom meant—not to dispense with the law entirely, for it is good, arguing that there is another law, the law of Christ, banning the sexual license that some saw in the idea, limiting the freedom that women were taking in some of the churches, urging some concern for 'weaker' brethren in outward observance (meat given to idols and so on). So we find that the same person who wrote 'not under the law, but under grace' (Rom. 6.14-15) and 'now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive' (Rom. 7.6) also wrote the text with which I began my discussion, 'Let every person be subject to the governing authorities... anyone who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed' (Rom. 13.1). The same mouth that dictated 'all who rely on works of the law are under a curse' (Gal. 3.10) also mentions that 'we uphold the law' (Rom. 3.31), that the law is 'holy' and 'good' (Rom. 7.11, 16). One more: to the Galatians he writes 'There is neither slave nor free... for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3.28), while he tells the Corinthians, 'Every one should remain in the state in which he was called' (1 Cor. 7.20). Paul would bequeath these tensions to whoever took up his ideas.

Imaginary Resolution

What are we to do with such tensions and political ambivalences in Paul's letters? We can identify roughly three responses. One is to gather all the

5. For the sake of argument, I assume with the bulk of studies of Paul that his references to opponents and opposing positions actually reflect real opponents. It would be far more interesting (but a different study) to explore the possibility that Paul manufactures these opponents in a deft piece of rhetorical shadow-boxing. By doing so, he brings his readers alongside by arraying himself against a range of imaginary opponents.

reactionary texts, argue that they are central, that Paul really did suck up to the powers that be and then show through some deft and devious exegetical arguments that the texts which contradict such a position—the anti-imperial ones which declare war on corrupt rulers and powers of this age—only do so apparently. Or we may take the opposite tack and argue that Paul is really a progressive deep down, that he consistently critiques ‘empire’. In this case, the exegetical procedure is reversed and texts like Romans 13 are explained away. A third approach is to search Paul’s context and identify some crucial third term outside his texts that provides the hidden key. These ideas are legion, so I provide but a few examples: the androgyne as the answer to the tension between universalism and dualism in Paul’s writings (Boyarín 1994; 2004); the Stoics who provide the inescapable philosophical and social background for Paul’s thought (Swancutt 2004), so much so that he is a philosopher first (Engberg-Pedersen 2000); the various *encomia*, *progymnasmata*, *physiognomics* and other rhetorical treatises that provide us with a picture of collective ‘Mediterranean’ notions of personality that must not be confused with ‘Western’ individualist notions in our understanding of Paul (Malina and Neyrey 1996); inheritance rights throughout the Ancient Near East, Greece and Rome which give some sense to Paul’s theme of adoption (Corley 2004); Hellenistic perceptions of sexuality and the body that become the necessary background for reading Paul (Martin 1995); and the *psychagogia*, the ‘leading of souls’ that runs through the moral philosophy of Greece and Rome which give us a sense of what Paul is all about in Philippians (Smith 2005).

These are well-worn approaches, but they operate with two assumptions: Paul must be a consistent thinker and the solution is idealistic. But what if Paul is not consistent? What if the contradictions in these few letters cannot be resolved? It seems to me that the political contradictions in Paul *are* unresolvable. Indeed, the effort to solve them and render Paul a consistent and systematic thinker is misguided, for there is enough evidence to draw the conclusion that Paul was a very inconsistent thinker. The question then becomes: why do these contradictions and paradoxes appear in Paul’s letters in the first place?

Further, these attempted solutions are resolutely idealistic. There is barely a wisp of smoke from a materialist proposal. Instead, one set of ideas is supposed to provide the solution to the problems of another set of ideas.⁶ It is a little like trying to repair your bicycle’s flat tyre by sitting down and

6. This idealistic affliction is the same, no matter what angle on Paul you prefer, whether the ‘old perspective’ with its introspective and theological Paul (loosely everything before 1980), the old ‘new perspective’ in which Paul must be understood in his Jewish context or the new ‘new perspective’ where the Roman Empire becomes the key.

thinking about it; or rather, it is as though I (the critic) join you (Paul) in thinking about your flat tyre while neither of us actually does anything about the tyre. To do so would be to take a materialist line. But that is precisely what I want to do in this last section of my argument—offer a materialist angle on Paul's contradiction of ideas.

My argument may be stated quite simply: Paul navigates at an intellectual and literary—or ideological—level the difficult passage from one socio-economic system to another. Let me dig this proposition out. A basic assumption of this argument is that the realms of thought, theology and writing are not divorced from their historical context, especially their socio-economic context. These activities do not take place in an autonomous and idealistic capsule, nor do they have a direct relation to their context as one might find in a political speech or piece of propaganda; rather, they are bound by intricate and indirect webs to that context. At this point I need to plough through a little theory.

The persuasive and very useful position I follow may be described as 'imaginary resolution', or more fully as an 'imaginary resolution of a real contradiction'. It has a rich pedigree, running from Claude Lévi-Strauss (1989: 229-56) through Louis Althusser (1971: 127-86), Fredric Jameson (1981: 77-80) and Michael Sprinker (1987) into our own day. Let me explain: rather than intentional and conscious responses to a situation, what this theory foregrounds is the role of far more powerful subconscious elements in our thought and lives. The core of the theory is that difficult and irresolvable social tensions will show up in the cultural products of a society, whether that is literature, art, film, television and what have you. Those cultural products will attempt to resolve the tensions in many possible fashions. Some may offer an alternative reality (as we find in science fiction or utopian works), others may present a story that violently breaks through the tensions (as in many works that solve the story's problems through a violent conflagration at the end), and others may do so through formal innovation (new genres in the mixture of old ones, new styles of painting and so on).

As an example, let me turn to none other than Lévi-Strauss himself. In *Tristes tropiques* (1989: 229-56), which is one of the best books I have ever read, he offers a reading of facial art among different indigenous tribes in South America. His interest was drawn to the facial decorations of the tribes he visited, especially the Caduveo. But those decorations indicate a tension, argues Lévi-Strauss, for they are based upon an axis at an oblique angle to the face. That is, rather than use the natural lines of nose, mouth and eyes, the Caduveo patterns follow another axis at an angle to these natural lines. So there are two axes in these face decorations. The reason: unlike the neighbouring Guana and Bororo, who have the social checks and balances of moieties to mitigate their caste system, the Caduveo have no such social solution. Their art becomes another means of dealing with the social

tensions. In other words, they made use of facial decoration to ameliorate and repress the social tensions between social groups within the tribe. The catch is that in the very effort to deal with such a tension, the art shows up the tension at a formal level.

So also with Paul's letters: they function as a persuasive imaginary resolution of the seismic shifts taking place in society and economics. The contradictions that show up in Paul's texts are creative and tension-ridden responses to socio-economic tension and tumult. The various contradictions—grace and law, faith and works, Jew and Gentile, death and resurrection and so on—may be seen as perpetual efforts at an intellectual and religious level to resolve a contradiction at a socio-economic level. And that contradiction is the fundamental one between clashing socio-economic systems. As New Testament scholars with an economic ear (all too rare among such scholars) have shown, Palestine at the time struggled with the imposition of a slave-based system over the top of a far older economic system that had been the status quo in the Ancient Near East for centuries.

Richard Horsley (1997) and those who follow him have been instrumental in highlighting the extraordinary transformations brought about in the Roman Empire by Caesar Augustus: the full-fledged development of the cult and gospel of the Emperor, the centralization of patron-client relations in the emperor, and the profound impacts of such changes in regional cities such as Ephesus and Corinth. Above all the infamous *Pax Romana* turns out to be a system of violence, blood, systematic destruction and enslavement in order to expand and maintain the empire. Let me quote Horsley:

During the first century BCE Roman warlords took over the eastern Mediterranean, including Judea, where Pompey's troops defiled the Jerusalem Temple in retaliation for the resistance of the priests. The massive acts of periodic reconquest of the rebellious Judean and Galilean people included *thousands enslaved* at Magdala/Tarichaea in Galilee in 52-51 BCE, *mass enslavement* in and around Sepphoris (near Nazareth) and thousands crucified at Emmaus in Judea in 4 BCE, and the systematic devastation of villages and towns, destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and *mass enslavement* in 67-70 CE. In the area of Paul's mission, the Romans ruthlessly sacked and torched Corinth, one of the most illustrious Greek cities, slaughtered its men, and *enslaved* its women and children in 146 BCE (1997: 10-11, emphasis added).

I have not emphasized parts of this text for nothing, for mass enslavement is the key economic issue. The Greeks and especially the Romans brought a new economic system to their Empire, a slave-based economic system in which the slaves did all the work and the relatively few 'citizens' did not.⁷

7. See both Sheila Briggs (2000) and the excellent book by Jennifer Glancy (2006), although a more systematic economic treatment would have strengthened these studies.

In economic terms, the extraction of surplus—what the slaves produced above their needs for subsistence—was extracted from them by those who owned them, thereby generating and maintaining their positions of wealth and power (see further Anderson 1974: 13-103). This slave-based system brutally and systematically replaced what I have elsewhere termed a Sacred Economy (Boer 2007). It is, to use the terms of economic history, a violent shift from one mode of production to another, one that gradually transformed the Roman Empire. The imposition of a different economic and social system took place in a piecemeal fashion through systematic violence and disruption, especially in the three or four centuries at the turn of the era.

One of the most obvious signs of this shift in social formations is a high level of violence, social unrest and conflict as the new system imposes itself on an older established one. Such troubled transitions produce displacement, tension and violence, in demographic, economic, social, political and psychological terms. The quotation from Horsley brings this out all too clearly: revolt after revolt cruelly crushed, until the Romans became so thoroughly sick and tired of it that they destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and banned Jews from entering the new city of Aelia Capitolina. One would have had to be a hermit from the moment of birth to avoid such seismic shifts, to steer clear of any political opinion whatsoever, or to want to resolve such tensions and conflicts in some fashion or other. Paul, I would suggest, is no exception.

So the oppositions I have traced all too briefly in Paul's texts may be regarded as the manifestations of such a massive and brutal transition. One after another they roll out of his texts, only to be treated in the various ways I suggested earlier. Each one is an alternative effort to deal with the fundamental socio-economic tension. For instance, siding with one side of the equation becomes an ethical decision for one or the other—life over death, grace over law, faith over works. This taking of sides is really the first option open to someone faced with a crushing opposition. But then Paul also suggests that 'in Christ' some of these oppositions are overcome. Here we have the famous trio of slave and free, Jew and Gentile, male and female. In this step Paul makes a first effort at what we might call mediating the oppositions. One negates them by positing a greater and higher reality into which they are absorbed. A third option goes even further: in this case Paul narrates a passage from one to the other, from death to life, from law to grace, from works to faith and from sin to redemption. In the process the first term is appropriated and transformed: so death becomes part of resurrection, law is still needed within grace, and works are transformed in faith. Even more, the effort to resolve these contradictions in some way ensures that they remain crucial elements of his texts. In this respect they are the strongest traces of Paul's troubled and ruptured socio-economic context.

The risk of such a strategy is very high. On the one hand, a transformative story like the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—the key narrative that holds all the oppositions together—may offer a radical breakthrough. It seems as though some of those who first heard and read Paul caught a glimpse of that breakthrough and wanted to take it further. With sin, law, works, as well as gender, ethnic and economic divisions overcome by the story of Christ's death and resurrection, the possibility opened up for a very new world that might be realized here and now—sexually, communally, politically, economically. On the other hand, the way Paul replicates the socio-economic tensions in the structure of his arguments, especially in terms of the oppositions I have been tracing, means that they may come back with a vengeance. Add to that the sense one sometimes gets that Paul himself was genuinely troubled by the radical possibilities of his thought and we have a real tendency towards reaction. So a transformed law may end up being a far more totalitarian law than the previous one, or reformed works may become an obsession with a whole new set of works, or proclaiming the end of gender, ethnic and economic tensions may avoid their very real presence in everyday life.

Paul is deeply ambivalent. Consciously, he tries to tone down the more radical effects of his thought, a move that exacerbates the tensions. Unconsciously he offers the possibility of a transformative breakthrough: the transformation and overcoming of the oppositions in his thought, all of them linked to the story of the death and resurrection of Christ, open up radical possibilities. Yet these same tensions are far too closely tied to the socio-economic tensions of his context—between an older and highly resistant system (Sacred Economy) and the brutal new system based on slavery—so much so that the old realities of law, works, gender, ethnicity and economy come back with a vengeance.

Conclusion

Let me close by returning to Romans 13 and the issue of 'empire'. The increasingly voluminous literature on 'empire' and the New Testament has been trying to argue that Paul and indeed the whole New Testament offers resistance to the Roman Empire. Apart from my misgivings at such an effort to detoxify and rescue the text once more (a deeply confessional effort), it does not measure up (see Moore 2006). Simply put, Paul is two-faced. He does at times seem to offer an alternative structure to those offered by the Roman Empire. It is an alternative 'gospel'—not one of the Emperor but of Jesus Christ – and another social structure known as the *ekklēsia*—not one sanctioned by the status quo. Here post-colonial and anti-imperial critics can find plenty of grips in Paul's texts. Yet we must remember that Paul also wrote, among others, those famous words in Romans 13.1, 'Let every

person be subject to the governing authorities'. And we must remember that it was a system of belief and practice that suited the Empire all too well, providing a new ideology of empire from Constantine onwards. Here the reactionaries find enough to see Paul as a friend and fellow ideologue. Given a choice of opposing or accommodating, Paul could not decide.

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SLAVE WO/MEN AND FREEDOM: SOME METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

In his book *The Bible and Empire*, R.S. Sugirtharajah whose pathbreaking work in hermeneutics and postcolonialism this volume honors, paraphrases former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's announcement of a new mission: 'The new missionary command is to preach the gospel of freedom, democracy, human rights and market economy, distinctly as defined by its western interest' (2005: 223). This neo-liberal gospel of freedom is preached in a world in which slavery exists on an unprecedented scale. However, most of us are not conscious that millions of people in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas have been forced by traffickers into prostitution or debt bondage, because we believe that slavery was abolished in the nineteenth century. For most people 'slavery' has become just a metaphor for undue hardship. This metaphorization of slavery and freedom makes global exploitation acceptable (Skinner 2008; Bales 1999; Miers 2003; Cockburn 2003).

Interpreting biblical texts in terms of such metaphorizations reinscribes this neo-liberal rhetoric in religious terms. Hence, it is crucial to read the biblical references to freedom and slavery in social-political rather than just in metaphorical terms, and I will do so here with respect to the 'Pauline' correspondence.¹ By placing the freedom of slave wo/men—which I use in the generic sense to include men²—in the center of attention, I seek to bring to the fore that freedom can only be fully seen and understood when juxtaposed and measured with respect to a materialist reading of slavery. To be free means *not* to be a slave wo/man in the global economy.

1. This controversial paper was prepared for the interdisciplinary and international consultation on 'Concepts and Practices of Freedom in the Biblical Traditions and Contemporary Contexts', sponsored by Dr Michael Welker, Ruprecht-Karls-University Heidelberg. I want to thank Professor Michael Welker and Ms. Sabine Wagner, the administrative organizer of the consultation, for inviting me and for supporting my work.

2. Such a use seeks to bring to awareness the fact that the generic masculine 'slaves' erases slave wo/men from consciousness and restricts the category of 'woman' to elite, free wo/men.

Just like slavery, freedom must be understood as first and foremost a socio-political expression that applies to the life of real people and not just to ideas. Hence, its rhetorical or philosophical use must be adjudicated in light of the institution of slavery and the effects of its ideologies on slave wo/men. Yet, this methodological approach is a minority approach. Works on slavery focus on the institution and ideology of slavery without listing 'freedom' as a key term in their index of subjects matters, and those on freedom tend to focus on the ideological-conceptual level³ and generally lack 'slavery' as a reference term.

If one juxtaposes freedom and slavery as socio-political-religious realities rather than just as distinct categories, then the question immediately arises as to whether the Christian scriptures in general and the Pauline tradition in particular have anything to say about actual freedom—that is, freedom from force, violence and dehumanization; freedom to move, act and decide according to one's own judgment and desire. Do they speak about such freedom of slave wo/men, or do they only speak about the idea or concept of freedom? Do they use freedom only in a metaphorical but not in a material sense? Does this mean that Christian freedom is not actual or social freedom but only conceptual and metaphorical? Many would argue that the latter is the case and that freedom means only spiritual freedom, not freedom from domination in the material sense. Such an argument is usually based on the assumption that 'real freedom' and the critique of slavery are only conceivable in a post-Enlightenment society. To quote James Dunn in place of many:

Hindsight and the superior wisdom of the post-Enlightenment European is not a very good base for criticism which attempts to censure first-century ethics. Slavery became a moral issue only with the Slave Trade.... The fact that our moral sensibilities have been sharpened over a span of two millennia should not give us license to find fault with those who, two millennia earlier, did not share our Enlightenment (1996: 60).

Charting the Problem

While freedom in the Pauline tradition has been much studied as a concept or ideal (Anshen 1940; Harris 1964; Niederwimmer 1966; Adler 1968; Betz 1977; and Vogt 1975), the meaning of slavery is not only to be understood in conceptual or metaphorical terms but also in a social-materialist sense. Whereas it is debated whether Paul himself condoned slavery, the so-called Haustafel texts of the Pauline tradition⁴ clearly speak about the proper

3. For the discussion of freedom from various perspectives, see Wirzubski 1950; Harris 1964; Nestle 1972; Jones 1987; Vollenweider 1989; Dunn 1999; and Galloway 2004.

4. For the key role of these texts in the reconstruction of early Christian beginnings, see Schüssler Fiorenza 1994.

behavior of Christian slave wo/men in actual bondage. The works of Balch (1981), Elliott (1981), Niederwimmer (1975), Crouch (1972), and Thraede (1970) have convincingly argued for such a socio-political understanding of slavery. Hence, these texts are the site on which freedom and slavery in the Pauline tradition has to be negotiated.⁵

The texts classified as *Haustafel*—a label derived from Lutheran teaching on social status and roles (*Ständelehre*)—are concerned with a threefold relationship to the *kyrios* of the household:⁶ that of wife, slave wo/man, and sons/children to the head of the household—the husband, slave-master, father, lord. Each member of this kyriarchal⁷ relationship receives different admonitions. The central interest of these texts is to enforce the submission and obedience of the socially weaker group—wives, slaves, and children—on the one hand, and the authority of the head of the household, the *pater familias*, on the other hand (Martin 1991).

The complete form of the *Haustafel* is found only in Col. 3.18–4.1 (Bugg 2006), which focuses on the admonition of slave wo/men, and Eph. 5.22–6.9, which focuses on the marriage relationship. The full form of the *Haustafel* is not found in the remaining passages: 1 Pet. 2.18–3.7; 1 Tim. 2.11–15; 5.3–8; 6.1–2; Tit. 2.2–10; 3.1–2; *1 Clem.* 21.6–8; Ignatius, *Pol.* 4.1–6.2; *Did.* 4.9–11; *Barn.* 19.5–7. One must therefore ask whether it is the three pairs of admonitions found only in Colossians and Ephesians that are characteristic of the form, or whether the pattern of submission/obedience is the most significant element.⁸ It seems, in fact, that the pattern of kyriarchal submission needs not always include all of the social status groups addressed in Colossians and Ephesians. The pattern sometimes mentions only some of the subordinate groups; it may also include obedience to the political powers of the state or address the governance of the Christian community (Lührmann 1975). The injunction to obedience and submissiveness occurs already in the authentic Pauline letters (Kittredge 1998), for example, in Romans 13 and 1 Corinthians 14. It therefore cannot be attributed solely

5. For the discussion of different historians' reconstruction of the lives of slave wo/men in antiquity, see McKeown 2007.

6. For the Roman household and 'family', see Dixon 1992; Garnsey and Saller 1990; Martin 1996; Bradely 1991; Saller 1994; Saller 2003; Balch and Osiek 1997; Lassen 1997; and Gardner 1998.

7. This neologism is derived from Greek *kyrios* and points to emperor, slave master, father, husband—the elite, propertied, male head of household. I suggest that this term is more appropriate than the commonly used 'hierarchical', since not all dominance relations are sacred.

8. For the argument that a 'pattern of submission' is characteristic for the *Haustafel* texts, see Lillie 1975. For a christological justification of this pattern of subordination, see Kähler 1960. For a feminist evangelical interpretation of the pattern as a pattern of 'mutual submission', see Mollenkott 1977; and Scanzoni and Hardesty 1975.

to what exegetes have called 'early Catholicism' (see Luz 1974). While this pattern of kyriarchal submission functions differently in different early Christian documents and their various social-ecclesial-historical contexts, the 'socio-political dimension' of this pattern is constant.

Much of the discussion of the 'household code' texts has focused on their historical-religious origin, as well as on their the*logical meaning and authority or their 'Christian' character. Research of the past twenty years or so, however, has raised significant questions as to their philosophical derivation and their social function, especially in view of emancipatory tendencies in the first century. Independently of each other, classicists like Thraede and 'New' Testament scholars like Lührmann, Balch, and Elliott have concluded that the household code texts share in the Aristotelian philosophical trajectory concerning household management (*oikonomia*) and political ethics (*politeia*). A political, philosophical tradition quite different from the Stoic code of duties—one concerned with the relationships between rulers and ruled in household and state—is present.

Previously, some exegetes had maintained that the Haustafel was uniquely Christian because it addressed the subordinate groups as moral agents (e.g. Schroeder 1959), whereas the majority of scholars believed that it was patterned after the Stoic code of duty (e.g. Crouch 1972; Balch 1981; Elliott 1981; and Weidinger 1928) and probably mediated by Hellenistic Jewish propaganda (Daube 1956: 90-105). This scholarly consensus seems to have given way to a socio-political interpretation which does not exclude the Stoic parallel but has the added virtue of accounting for the typical three sets of subordinate relationships and admonitions.

Thus the discussions of the last two decades seem to have made a significant breakthrough regarding the philosophical provenance of the 'code'. Such research has documented a growing interest among diverse philosophical directions and schools in the first century to reassert this Aristotelian political ethos—albeit often in a modified, milder form (Thraede 1981; O'Brien Wicker 1975; and Balch 1977). The 'household code' ethic of the 'New' Testament shares in this stabilizing reception of Aristotelian ethics and politics.

Aristotle, in contrast to the Sophists, stressed that the kyriarchal relationships in household and city, as well as their concomitant social differences, are based not on social convention but on 'nature'. He therefore insisted that the discussion of political ethics and household management begin with 'the smallest parts; and the primary and smallest parts of the household are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children' (*Politics* 1253b). According to Page duBois, Aristotle takes the domination of the master over the slave as paradigmatic for all forms of rule and authority (2008: 189-205).

Hence, I submit that the Haustafel is best understood as 'pattern of kyriarchal submission' which legitimates the power of the *kyrios*—the free head

of household and citizen—over his slaves, wife and children who are subject to his power. That is, the latter groups are not free. The kyriarchal household and state are the points of reference for the meaning of the pattern of kyriarchal submission. The kyriarchal household pattern conceives not only of family, but also of church and state in terms of the patriarchal household. The Christian community soon comes to be called ‘the household of God’, and G*d is understood as *Herr* (*kyrios* = slavemaster) and father in analogy to the great kings of the ancient Near-East and the Roman emperors who, from the time of Augustus, were understood as the *pater patriae* (Syme 1939: 509-524; Schüssler Fiorenza 2007).

In light of the scholarly consensus on the Haustafel as a part of political philosophy, the question of whether it was already Paul or the post-Pauline tradition that introduced and advocated this Greco-Roman ‘pattern of kyriarchal submission’ has become even more pressing. Scholars usually try to address this puzzle by arguing that, in his letter to Philemon⁹ and in 1 Cor. 7: 21-24,¹⁰ Paul advocates that slave wo/men should become free and be treated as ‘beloved’. However, both texts are so ambiguous that equally as many scholars argue that Paul insists they remain in slavery. Yet, the undecidability of Paul’s meaning and the ambiguity of the Pauline texts on slave-wo/men’s behavior make it possible to argue that the post-Pauline tradition could plausibly claim the teaching of Paul on slavery for its legitimization of slave wo/men’s unfreedom.

This textual situation—Pauline ambiguity about slavery and post-Pauline advocacy of the ethos of slavery—has constituted a serious hermeneutical and the*logical problem not only for abolitionists in the American slave controversy of the nineteenth century (Harrill 2006: 165-92), but also still does so for progressive exegetes, theologians, and churches. Whereas it is debated whether Paul opted for the freedom of slave wo/men or not, there is no doubt that Paul’s teaching used the metaphor of slavery to characterize the past and present situation of Christians, the religious realm, and power of sin. Paul’s metaphorical use of ‘slavery’ erases the brutal lived realities of slavery as well as the power differences between slave and free wo/men. It seems that slavery as a socio-political institution and its practices are religiously legitimated, while at the same time the metaphorization of slavery by Paul erases the differences between slave and free wo/men.

In a similar way, the injunction to husbands to love (Eph. 5.25-33; Col. 3.19) does not undermine this traditional kyriarchal structure but reinforces

9. It is debated whether Onesimus was a run-away slave, a slave sent to Paul by Philemon, or no slave at all. Cf. Callahan 1993; 1997; Lampe 1985; and Winter 1994.

10. Causing the problem of interpretation is the brachylogy of 1 Cor. 7.21b, that is, the omission of an object for the phrase *mallon chrēsai* (‘rather use’), which one can supplement either with freedom or with slavery.

it. Freeborn wives are not called to love, but to subordination, because they do not possess the freedom of the master of the house. Moreover, slave-masters are not required to have *agapē* for their slave wo/men. Finally, in such a kyriarchal structure and mindset, the exhortations to the whole community to love one another would mean something different to freeborn men than to slave wo/men—or to husbands than to wives—since mutual love requires freedom and choice. If *agapē* requires the freedom to love and is not possible under compulsion and force, then the fulfillment of the much-touted Pauline ‘love ethic’ did not apply to the majority of Christians—neither to freeborn women nor to slave wo/men—but only to *kyrioi*, or freeborn elite men.

Rather than critically analyze and discuss the replacement of freedom with *agapē* and its consequences, scholars—as far as I can see—have developed the following arguments in ‘defense of Paul’:

1. Most often, it is argued that Paul and early Christianity could not abolish the all-pervasive legal system of Roman slavery because they did not have the power to do so. Hence, we do not find a direct statement in the Christian Testament that would condemn slavery outright. Paul is a ‘man of his time’ and cannot be blamed for not advocating the abolition of slavery.¹¹ As Orlando Patterson categorically states:

Paul neither defended nor condemned the system of slavery, for the simple reason that in the first century Roman imperial world in which he lived, the abolition of slavery was intellectually inconceivable, and socially, politically and economically impossible (1998: 266).

However, this argument avoids the problem posed by the Pauline tradition. It is not a question of whether Paul was able to abolish the *system of slavery*, but a question of whether the proclamation ‘for freedom Christ has set us free’ had any implications for the lives of slave wo/men who joined the messianic *ekklēsia*. In other words, did conversion and baptism involve manumission or being treated as an equal in the early Christian house churches, or did it only pertain to one’s soul? This question is an appropriate question since we know that synagogues and certain Jewish groups such as the Essenes and the Therapeutae enabled manumission and freedom for slave wo/men. We also know that private associations admitted slave wo/men as full members.

2. Another attempt to save Paul from his critics is to argue that the ‘opponents’ of Paul were libertine enthusiasts and hence Paul had to curb their demands for unlimited freedom. While the ‘opponent’ construction has fallen

11. Allan R. Bever, for example, argues, ‘Christians of the time had little power to change politically. Indeed, given the fact that there was no such thing as representative democracy, it likely would never have occurred to them to try and change the structures’ (2003: 247 n. 94).

into disrepair, the 'anti-imperial' Paul has been championed by scholars in the past decade or so. It is argued, on the one hand, that Paul thinks in terms of the Roman imperial universe of slavery; on the other hand, however, his metaphorical use of slavery does not re-inscribe it, but radically challenges it. Richard Horsley, for example, has argued that Christ, in his resurrection, has become a *counter-emperor* and Paul's mission was 'to build a new international society as an alternative to Roman imperial society' (1998: 189). It was Paul who built this new society and developed its symbolic universe 'from scratch' (Horsley 1998: 165). Although Paul did not explicitly criticize institutionalized slavery, his program was far more radical than to simply point out abusive aspects of the slave system.

However, Paul could not count on 'his' communities to continue his radical anti-imperial program, so the argument goes, because his communities had internalized the dominant symbolic universe of imperial slave society. Thus, a genuine re-socialization into the alternative symbolic universe was difficult. Although a new ideal was articulated in Gal. 3.28, and probably baptismally embodied, it was difficult for it to take root in the communities.

Thus it is also not surprising to find in the Deutero-Pauline letters Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastorals a reversion to the basic hierarchical social relations of the imperial order embodied in the slave-holding patriarchal household (Horsley 1998: 191).

This apology for Paul constructs a deep chasm between the anti-imperial Paul, his failing communities, and the following generation. It also seeks to downplay the metaphorical inscription of the slavery system into the early Christian symbolic universe.

3. A third way to explain away the defense and inculcation of the ethos of slavery in the Pauline tradition is to question the thesis of those who understand the pre-Pauline baptismal formula Gal. 3.28 as not only articulating an ideal but also as having been realized in practice. In a spirited reply to Horsley, Stanley K. Stowers insists that the understanding of slavery as evil comes not from the Bible, but stems from modern Enlightenment thinking which understands the person as autonomous and self-governing (1998). In Paul's Bible, Stowers argues, 'slavery is pervasive, brutal, and sanctioned by God' (1998: 306). The Hebrew Bible not only allows slavery, but also speaks of the Israelites as slaves of G*d. Hence, Stowers concludes: 'It seems that those who have seen Paul as an opponent of slavery have not come to terms with the scripture that Paul held as authoritative' (1998: 306).

Moreover, those who understand Gal. 3.28 as claiming that the status differences between Jewish and Greek wo/men, slave and free wo/men, and between husband and wife are no longer valid in Christ operate allegedly

with the modern assumption that social roles and attributes can be peeled away. However, if one were to peel away socially-imposed roles in Mediterranean society—so the argument goes—one would find nothing. In such a society, the self is not ‘trapped behind social roles’ but is ‘constituted in social interaction’ (1998: 306). Stowers maintains, therefore, that Gal. 3.28 does not mean that social status, ethnicity or the sexes have ‘been eliminated, even if the importance of such roles has been relativized, because the form of this world is passing away’ (1998: 307).

However, Stowers seems not to recognize that it is he who construes the interpretation of Gal. 3.28 in terms of a modern understanding of the person as autonomous from social roles. Slavery is not a ‘social role’, I would argue, but a kyriarchal institution that robs people of their humanity and personhood. Stowers also falls prey to the same modern fallacy of which he accuses others when he assumes that only modern persons—but not ancient Mediterraneans—could envision a life in freedom. This overlooks the information we have on slave wo/men’s uprisings. Fugitive slave wo/men constituted a serious problem and massive slave wo/men revolts took place between 140 and 70 BCE (Bradley 1989). These uprisings, which ‘assumed the scale of a war with thousands of armed men on both sides and pitched battles between armies, sieges, and occupation of cities’ (Callahan 1998: 143), were not fought in order to become free of ‘slave roles’ and find one’s ‘true self’, but were fought for freedom from the dehumanizing bondage of slavery. To suggest that ancient Mediterranean slave wo/men could not envision being free is itself a modernist prejudice.

4. The fourth strategy in defense of Paul’s and the whole Christian Testament’s ambivalent stance toward slavery and the Pauline tradition’s advocacy of slavery is the scholarly recourse to ‘eschatology’¹² or ‘apocalypticism’. However, it is rarely acknowledged that both the terms ‘apocalypticism’ and eschatology are ‘modern’ terms created by scholars in the nineteenth century. The term eschatology, designating the teaching about the ‘last things’ and about the ‘end of the world’, is a dogmatic creation of the*logical scholarship.

Paul, so it is argued, expected the end of the world and Jesus’ return in glory very soon, and hence he did not develop a ‘social program’ of political equality and freedom. Since the end of the world was at hand, one should not expect Paul to be concerned with the abolition of slavery or with building an egalitarian society. Rather, Paul expected the ‘Day of the Lord’ and the *parousia* of Christ in the imminent future. Like the parables of Jesus,

12. Larry Hurtado’s paper on ‘Freed by Love and for Love: Freedom in the New Testament’, which he presented in the consultation ‘Concepts and Practices of Freedom in the Biblical Traditions and Contemporary Contexts’ I mentioned in the beginning, is an example of this strategy.

he envisioned G*d as a Lord and slave-master whose judgment and wrath would destroy all dehumanizing powers in the very near future (Beavis 1992; Glancy 2002: 102-129).

However, this argument overlooks that the 'New' Testament on the whole, including the Pauline correspondence, also knows of a different kind of eschatology which scholars have dubbed 'realized eschatology'. This is the conviction that G*d's alternative world and society have already begun, here and now. The proclamation 'for freedom Christ has set us free' speaks of the past, not the future. The central image of salvation is that of 'being bought free from slavery at a high price'. The power of *hamartia*, from which the baptized were set free, is the power to enslave. The proclamation 'for freedom Christ has set us free' (Gal. 5.1) does not speak about our soul but about *us*, that is, about people, about those baptized into the messianic corporation—at least that is how it could have been heard by slave wo/men in the community. Whereas Paul might have understood the 'yoke of slavery' to be the law, slave wo/men could have understood and identified it as unfreedom and bondage, as slavery itself.

To summarize: The understanding that emerges if one reads Paul or the Christian Testament in an idealistic fashion which emphasizes the conceptual aspects of its teaching about freedom is different from what emerges if one reads texts as rhetorical arguments that engage actual problems and opinions. While an analysis in terms of Paul's concepts and thought focuses on the great apostle who teaches with authority and has the power to enforce his teachings, a rhetorical approach sees Paul as one voice among many within a rhetorical debate. Rhetoric does not just focus on the author but also on the audience, the rhetorical situation and the socio-political-religious location of the speaker and the argument. It does not just focus on *logos* but also on *pathos* and *ethos* (Schüssler Fiorenza 1999).

By 'defending the teaching of Paul', however, scholars avoid both asking whether Paul's teaching was accepted and exploring the consequences of his metaphorical use of slavery for the practice of freedom. Hence, they are able neither to address the violence of unfreedom legitimated by pro-slavery scriptural texts nor to ask whether such kyriarchal violence is intrinsic to Christian self-understanding and the*logy. Moreover, by identifying Paul's teaching and conceptuality with early Christian beliefs and practices, they overlook not only that his 'teaching and conceptuality' are argumentative rhetoric, but also that there were alternative voices and options that sought to achieve and maintain slave wo/men's freedom.

Instead, the 'defense of Paul' resorts to a spiritualizing and moralizing approach to freedom in terms of love, i.e. to an antiquarian understanding of interpretation which maintains that the desire for freedom and equality is a modern post-Enlightenment projection and that slave wo/men in antiquity were not capable of such desire—although the Roman slave wars and slave

resistances document the opposite. When scholarly arguments neglect the ‘other’ voices in the debate which are inscribed in the Pauline tradition, or when they do not engage in a discussion as to why slave wo/men and their desires for freedom do not need to come into view, they re-inscribe familiar prejudices against slave wo/men as ‘things without voice’. If we instead assume that slave wo/men took the baptismal confession ‘neither slave nor free wo/men’ in the ‘messianic corporation’ at face value and insisted on their equality, we then must carefully examine assumptions and methods which allow scholars to rule out such an argument on grounds of their theoretical framework, and to in turn hide behind the apologetic argument that abolition of the institution of slavery was not possible or thinkable at the time.

Methodological—Hermeneutical Reflections

Placing slave wo/men and their struggles in early Christianity rather than the concept of freedom at the center of hermeneutical attention will require several shifts in methodological and hermeneutical approach. First of all, it requires a methodological shift from a philosophical idealist tendency, which emphasizes concepts, to an understanding of text as rhetorical construction and persuasive communication. Understanding texts as arguments requires that one not only ask what the text means, but also whom it seeks to persuade, whose interests it articulates, and to what ends.

The result is different if one reads the Pauline tradition or the ‘New’ Testament on the whole as rhetorical argument rather than as ‘teaching’, or as a collection of concepts and ideas. As I have already suggested, rhetoric does not just focus on the author but also on the audience, the rhetorical situation and the socio-political-religious location of the speaker, audience and argument. It does not just focus on *logos* but also on *pathos* and *ethos*. In the following, I would like to focus on four such shifts:

First, approaching the topic of freedom in the Pauline tradition in and through a focus on slave wo/men raises three key methodological issues:

1. How should we read grammatically kyriocentric—i.e. elite male (*kyrios* = slavemaster) centered—texts? In the kyriocentric text, slave wo/men are doubly invisible. On the one hand, the masculine form of *doulos* is usually not translated as male slave but as the generic *slave*, while the feminine form always is translated as female slave. However, slave wo/men as historical agents are generally not mentioned in the Pauline corpus, the one exception being an allegorical reference (Gal. 4.24-31). On the other hand, the gendered generic term *gynē* or ‘woman’ also does not signal that it refers only to freeborn wo/men. Hence, studies on ‘women’ in the Pauline tradition always focus on freeborn wo/men. To keep slave wo/men in the center of hermeneutical attention requires a re-theoretization not only of gender

but also of class/status and race. For instance, texts such as 1 Corinthians 6 and 7 raise quite different issues if one keeps in mind that slave wo/men were the sexual property of their male and female masters, that they often could not marry or keep their children, and that they were frequently forced into prostitution. It raises the foundational question as to whether freedom was the pre-condition, the *sine qua non*, for being a morally accountable member of the *ekklēsia*.

2. Placing slave wo/men in the center of attention also requires that one move from a descriptive analysis of the text to a rhetorical analysis—one that pays attention not only to the author and his statements, but also to the audience to whom the text is addressed, the rhetorical problem it seeks to overcome, and the socio-political situation and symbolic universe shared by author and audience. Generally, the label rhetoric/rhetorical is understood to refer to speech as stylistic ornament, technical means or linguistic manipulation—as discourse utilizing irrational, emotional devices that are contrary to critical thinking and reasoning. However, this negative—though both popular and academic—understanding of rhetoric must be carefully distinguished from rhetoric understood as a communicative intellectual practice involving contexts, interests, values and visions. The revival of rhetoric as critical, cultural and intellectual discourse has both rediscovered the significance of rhetoric in the production of knowledge in general and underscored the ‘rhetoricity’ or ‘rhetorality’ of texts and interpretations in particular. The *rhetoric of inquiry* focuses on epistemological and disciplinary questions such as the following: How is knowledge constructed? What counts as interesting research question? What kind of knowledge gets privileged? How is disciplinary authority constructed? What kind of socio-political or cultural religious interests are served? There are many more. Hence, I suggest that one needs to adopt a critical rhetorical analysis of the whole Pauline tradition, including the letters that scholars deem to be post-Pauline, in order to approach adequately the problem of slave wo/men and freedom.

3. A rhetorical approach calls for an ethics of interpretation and a hermeneutics of critical evaluation to be applied to biblical texts that function as authoritative scripture in Christian communities today. Two examples may suffice:

The Hagar–Sarah allegory in Gal. 4.21–31 contrasts the slave woman and the free woman in order to illustrate enslavement to the law and freedom in Christ (Briggs 2000; 2003). Although Paul is not addressing the social institution of slavery here, he re-inscribes the dichotomies between slaves and free in the interest of Christian superiority. He does so in order to theologically divest non-Christian Judaism of its claim to religious identity as descended from Abraham. Christian freedom’s identity and superiority is purchased in and through ‘the casting out’ of the son of the slave woman. A

bloody history of Christian anti-Judaism has been the consequence of this rhetoric. Without question, the rhetoric of this text

depends on metaphors taken from the institution of slavery and the sexual use of women in slavery. One may argue that Paul's use of the language of slavery in figurative speech did not constitute an endorsement of slavery in the social realm; however, one cannot simply sever the rhetorical strategy from the content of the discourse (Briggs 1994: 224).

To give another example, Paul's discussion of freedom in the letter to the Romans also theologically re-inscribes the Roman imperial discourse of slavery and freedom (Castelli 1994: 293-95). With the collapse of the Roman Republic, Patterson claims that civic political freedom was replaced with the absolutist, sovereign freedom of the divine emperor who embodied the imperial state and guaranteed the collective security and honor of Roman citizens (1991). In Romans, freedom is a free gift bestowed by G*d who is characterized as *kyrios*—a slave-master. The free gift of freedom requires obedience and subjection to this master. Now that the baptized have been set free from the power of sin, they have 'become enslaved to G*d' (Rom. 6.20-23). By becoming 'slaves of G*d' (Martin 1990; Peterson 1983), Christians become exactly what slaves are to their master. Patterson diagnoses this Pauline rhetoric as the 'power language of the imperial ruling elite' (1991: 341). According to Patterson,

Paul boldly turns the contemptuous Roman view of the Christians on its head, arguing that in their endurance and suffering they build just the kind of character which the elite Roman idealized. Gone, it seems, is the reversal of status, the sublation of powerlessness into power (1991: 342).

If so, gone also is the sublation that characterized the rhetoric of the baptismal formula in Gal. 3.28. Hence, a hermeneutics of suspicion and critical evaluation for proclamation is required if Christians do not want to continue the imperial rhetoric of enslavement to G*d. The task of a critical ethics and the*logy of evaluation is not simply to validate the original meaning of the text, but also to assess its inscriptions of meaning and their function in our own contemporary contexts. It seeks to engender a different constellation of the the*logical discourses, cultural visions and social worlds evoked by sacred texts along with the contemporary struggles against slavery and for freedom. Attention to the the*logical re-inscription of freedom in terms of the imperial slave system would allow us to formulate an alternative understanding of freedom fashioned in and through the *ekklēsia*, understood as the radically democratic decision-making assembly for whose existence freedom is a *sine qua non* condition.

Second, the focus on slave wo/men engenders a critical rhetoric of inquiry that is able to facilitate a shift from a philosophical-the*logical focus on *concepts* of freedom to the exploration of the *intersection* of freedom in the

ekklēsia and the impact of the imperial institution of slavery on it. Paul's rhetoric of freedom and slavery can only be assessed if it is analyzed as a persuasive communication in a particular historical–rhetorical situation, constructing a symbolic universe that is shared by the people to whom he writes. Hence, one cannot be content to simply outline the the*logical 'concepts' of the Pauline tradition; one also needs to examine how its the*logical language relates to social structures and ecclesial conflicts, as well as how it is shaped by its particular socio-political and historical situation. The conflicts in Galatia or Corinth were not debates about abstract the*logical concepts but about different ways of viewing the world and about rhetorical struggles to define the self-understanding and life of the *ekklēsia*. Paul is one, but not the *sole* authoritative voice in these debates. For instance, Gal. 3.28—which declares the socio-political status divisions between Jews and Greeks, slave and free wo/men, male and female as no longer existing in Christ, i.e. in the *ekklēsia*—is in this view not understood as a peak formulation of Paul, but as a pre-Pauline baptismal tradition shared by Paul and the Galatian, Corinthian, Ephesian or Roman Christians, and possibly understood differently by different groups of people. The so-called Haustafel texts of the Pauline tradition which require the subjection of freeborn wives, slave wo/men, and all Christians to kyriarchal domestic and political structures of domination are not authoritative statements. Rather, they are arguments seeking the*logically to intervene on behalf of the established imperial Roman order.

Third, a shift of theoretical attention from Paul to slave wo/men as historical agents requires a shift from a history of ideas to a history of struggles, from text to context. For instance, in his magisterial work *Freedom*, Orlando Patterson argues that 'freedom was socially constructed—not discovered... in a specific pair of struggles generated by slavery' (1991: 3). Kurt Raaflaub, on the other hand, shows that the political notion of freedom was articulated in the context of the Persian wars when the isonomic Greek *polis* resisted occupation and domination by an authoritarian monarchic empire that had quite different value-systems and social-political structures. This confrontation and conflict was now understood in terms of freedom and slavery, a conflict that strengthened the ethos of the isonomic *polis* as the assembly of free and equal citizens (1985). Both explorations of the concept of freedom stress that it needs to be understood in terms of the struggles against subjection and slavery.

The re-construction of a democratic *ekklēsia* discourse¹³ as an alternative to the discourse of empire is necessary in order to understand and evaluate Pauline the*logy in terms of the struggles submerged in historical texts. Attention to the democratic language of *ekklēsia* and the subordination discourses of empire in the Pauline tradition will break open and expand

13. For the reconstruction of such a discourse, see Miller 2008.

the resources for the the*logical discussion of freedom. It will caution us against understanding freedom too quickly in terms of relationality and self-giving love. Articulating biblical theology in terms of the rhetoric and ethos of empire and *ekklēsia*, i.e. the democratic assembly of full citizens, allows one to trace the interaction of multiple perspectives and makes possible a discourse that can bring those who are historically silenced and marginalized, such as slave wo/men, into view. In the current moment, when the rhetoric of the 'free world' and the 'empires of evil', winners and losers, good and evil, orthodoxy and heresy threatens to exclude and do violence, such a the*logical discourse is urgently needed.

However, the significant work done on Paul and empire in recent years has persisted in understanding itself as uncovering the 'real', anti-imperial Paul.¹⁴ The desire to have Paul represent 'anti-imperial' discourse has prevented direct confrontation with the manner in which Paul's language and practice is shaped by empire. Because these scholars have not acknowledged the constructive and rhetorical dimension of their work, its impact has not been as effective as it may have been in bringing into dialogue the ancient and contemporary contexts. Recovery and reconstruction of the conflict inscribed in Pauline discourses between the rhetoric of *ekklēsia* and that of empire, both of which are present within the breadth of early Christian communities, would advance the discussion of 'Paul and politics' or 'freedom in the Pauline tradition' in a necessary and important direction.

The *fourth* shift is a shift from legitimating the Pauline the*logical re-inscription of freedom in terms of the imperial slave system to articulating an alternative rhetoric and practice of freedom, one to which the Pauline and post-Pauline discourse of freedom can be understood as a rhetorical response. This presupposes that we seek to listen to the voices to whom the extant Pauline tradition responds and with whom it argues. This means that first of all we have to relinquish our understanding of Paul as the sole founder and authoritative the*logian of the communities to whom he writes. Rather than seeing Paul, in a modernist fashion, as the only leader and charismatic individual, one needs to think of him as one of many voices that have shaped the symbolic universe and social practices of early Christian communities.

Envisioning the Struggles of Slave Wo/men for Freedom

The assertion 'for freedom Christ has set us free from slavery' can be understood as a common confession to which Paul appeals in Galatians and which he uses toward his own argumentative ends. But if early Christians did not have the power to abolish the system of slavery, as many scholars have

14. See Schüssler Fiorenza 2007 for the literature and its discussion.

pointed out, what kind of historical-rhetorical situation could one construct to which this rhetoric can be seen as a fitting response? Two characteristics of Roman slavery in distinction to Athenian slavery seem to be significant.

First, although slavery was a brutal institution, there were not only ideological but also practical tendencies in the Roman Empire to mitigate at least urban slavery. Law and literature of the time sought to curb physical cruelty and emphasized that slave wo/men were human beings and should be allowed a level of independence as well as certain rights and freedoms. It was in the interest of masters and slave wo/men, for example, that slave wo/men could accumulate wealth (*peculium*) for doing business. Moreover, since all masters invested money in their slave wo/men, reasonable treatment of them was in their masters' own interests.

However, most important is the religious ethos that demanded equality. In his description of the 'contemplative' or 'philosophical' life of the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides (Taylor 2003), Philo stresses that this ascetic community has

no slaves to wait upon them as they consider that the ownership of servants is entirely against nature. For nature has borne all to be free, but the wrongful and covetous acts of some who pursued that source of inequality have imposed their yoke and invested the stronger with power over the weaker (*Vit. cont.* 70).

Instead of slave wo/men, young freeborn men served at table at their communal meals.

Philo speaks in a similar fashion about the Essenes, a Jewish community that is often identified with the Qumran community:

Not a single slave is found among them, but all are free, exchanging services with each other and they denounce the owners of slaves, not merely for their injustice in outraging the law of equality, but also for their impiety in annulling the stature of Nature, who, mother-like, has born and reared all alike, and created them genuine brothers, not in mere names but in very reality (*Omn. prob. lib.* 79; cited in Garnsey 1996: 78).

Second, in distinction to classical slavery, Roman slavery condoned manumission by individuals and corporate manumission. Formal manumission reintegrated slave wo/men into society by making them Roman citizens. Although the system of slavery was entrenched in the Roman Empire, the manumission of individual slave wo/men as well as corporate manumission were widespread. This willingness to free slaves may not have been for humanitarian reasons, but it indicates that Roman slavery was not automatically a life-long state (Harrill 1995).

In light of these two discourses of manumission, the ethical and the legal, two scenarios can be envisioned to have been in play in the messianic *ekklēsia*. One is the ethos of equality and freedom in the house-church, the

other is the practice of buying the freedom of slave wo/men who belonged to non-Christian households either by individual patrons or with the funds of the congregation. The fact that this dual possibility existed in the *ekklēsia* is apparent, for instance, in the injunction of 1 Tim. 6.1-2, a text that is dated around the same time as Ignatius' *Letter to Polycarp*, and which distinguishes between two groups of slave wo/men. The first verse tells slave wo/men to 'regard their masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of G*d and the teaching may not be blasphemed', whereas the second is addressed to those who have 'believing masters'. In both cases the ethos of slavery is rhetorically re-enforced. On the one hand, slave wo/men who complained about and called for the repentance of their Christian masters who had fallen back into the sin of the kyriarchal practices of slavery are told 'not to be disrespectful' to them on the grounds that they are 'brothers', members of the church. On the other hand, slave wo/men who may have pleaded to be bought free from pagan slave masters are told to respect them.

The first scenario of slave wo/men asking to be treated as equals in the house-church is similar to that of the Therapeutae. This demand would have made sense both in cases where the whole household was baptized and became Christian and in house-churches whose members were all coming from Christian households. Hence, they did not need to undergo a formal manumission because the baptismal affirmation 'for freedom Christ has set us free' had given them equal standing in the *ekklēsia*. In this case, the social-status differences between slave master/mistress and slave wo/men would have been replaced by the notion that all the baptized are 'siblings' (Aasgard 2004; Schäfer 1989) and 'beloved' children of G*d. Hence, on the basis of the ethos of equality and freedom, mutuality and respect among the different members of the household were to be practiced. However, the exhortation of 1 Timothy admonishes slave wo/men and not masters. It does not rebuke the masters for failing to live the Christian ethos of equality and freedom, but rather uses this ethos to reinforce the submissive behavior of Christian slave wo/men.

The second scenario is referred to by Ignatius of Antioch. Writing to the bishop Polycarp in Smyrna, Asia Minor, he testifies to the early Christian practice of corporate manumission, although he is against it.

Do not behave arrogantly towards slaves, either male or female. But let them not be puffed up. Rather let them be enslaved all the more to the glory of G*d. Let them not desire to be manumitted out of the money in the common chest, so that they may not be found slaves of desire (*Pol.* 4.3).

It seems that early Christian *ekklēsia* had adopted the Roman practice of manumission to enact the second scenario, which required the formal manumission of slave wo/men who belonged to non-Christian masters. Slave

wo/men could be and regularly were given their freedom in the Roman Empire. The widespread manumission of slaves was a distinctive feature of the Roman institution of slavery (Hope 2000: 129). Moreover, corporate manumission seems to have been practiced by private associations, in cultic places, such as Delphi, and by Jewish synagogues.

According to Harrill, evidence for this practice is found among Jewish communities all over the ancient world, from Egypt to the north shores of the Black Sea. Jewish synagogues had common chests.

These chests functioned institutionally in ways similar to those in a Roman *collegium* (*arca collegii*, *arca communis*, *arca publica*, *ratio publica*, *res-publica collegii*) which one or more officers of the association managed. Hellenistic private associations also operated a common fund (*tameion*, *koinon*) (1993: 122).

Harrill suggests that Ignatius saw three dangers in the corporate practice of manumission by Christians which he seeks to avoid with this exhortation (1993: 136). Firstly, there was the fear that some would join the Christian community only for the sake of money, expecting that the *ekklēsia* would buy their freedom; secondly, there was the danger of pagan slander against Christians for subverting slavery; and thirdly, there was the potential problem of rivalry and competition among the different house churches in a metropolitan area which Ignatius sought to unify under the authority of one bishop. E.A. Judge has pointed to a fourth possible reason why such practices of manumission were curtailed or rejected by the writers of the so-called household code tradition:

With regard to the household obligation, the NT writers are unanimous; its bonds and conventions must at all costs be maintained.... There is of course... the interest of the patronal class... but the primary reason, no doubt, is that the entrenched rights of the household as a religious and social unit offered the Christians the best possible security for their existence as a group. Any weakening here would thus be a potentially devastating blow to their own cohesion, as well as having revolutionary implications from the point of view of the public authorities (1960: 75).

Judge sees correctly that the rhetoric of the 'household code' is due to the interest of the 'patronal', or, better, the 'master' class. He plays this insight down, however, by arguing instead with the *Haustafel* tradition in the interest of masters rather than slave wo/men. Yet, his argument nevertheless presupposes that the house-church was governed by the 'principles of fraternity' and that it presented a threat only 'if enthusiastic members failed to contain their principles within the privacy of the association and thus were led into political indiscretions or offenses against the hierarchy of the household' (1960: 76). Such an argument overlooks the fact that the conversion of free wo/men, slave wo/men, and young people who belonged to the

household of an unconverted *pater familias* already constituted a potential political offense against the kyriarchal order. This had to have been considered an infringement of the political order, for the kyriarchal order of the house was considered the paradigm of the state. Since the kyriarchal *familia* was the nucleus of the state, conversion of the subordinated members of the household who were expected to share in the religion of the *pater familias* already constituted a subversive act. Buying them free from their masters, however, would not have undermined, but would rather have followed the Roman order.

The prescriptive Haustafel trajectory attempted to play down this subversive potential by asserting the congruence of the Christian ethos with that of kyriarchal house and state, rather than by purchasing free slave wo/men who had converted. This trajectory did not continue the ethos of the house-church, with its egalitarian and collegial structures, but sought to modify this ethos and bring it in line with the structures of kyriarchal family and society.¹⁵ In doing so, the Haustafel trajectory sought to kyriarchalize not only the early Christian ethos of ‘fraternity’, or, better, of ‘the discipleship of equals’, but also the very structures of the Christian community. However, the prescriptive character of the Haustafel texts indicates that such a process of kyriarchalization was still not in force in subsequent centuries, and it has never been completely accomplished.

In both scenarios of reconstruction, the early Christian assertion ‘for freedom Christ has set us free’ would have engendered a concrete practice of actual freedom from slavery. As I have argued in *In Memory of Her*, slave wo/men who joined the messianic community expected to be treated as free persons. Such expectations were engendered by the Christian proclamation that all members of the community were ‘set free by Christ’. Such formulas occur again and again in the Pauline letters: ‘You were bought with a price, do not become human slaves’ (1 Cor. 6.20; 7.23). The goal of Christian calling is freedom: ‘You were called to freedom’ (Gal. 5.13), because ‘where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom’ (2 Cor. 3.17). To argue that Christian freed-wo/men who insisted on their call to freedom had only ‘a superficial understanding of the gospel’ (Crouch 1972: 127) is to minimize the effects of this the*logical rhetoric of freedom in a Greco-Roman context where both slavery and manumission were commonly-accepted institutional practices.

Liberation from the slavery of the dehumanizing powers of sin, slave law, and death—from the conditions of the present ‘evil age’—has ‘freedom’ as its goal and purpose. Hans Dieter Betz writes, ‘As a result, *eleutheria* [‘freedom’] can be understood as the central the*logical concept

15. For the distinction between ethos and ethics, see Keck 1980. For the interrelation between house church and *collegia*, see Malherbe 1977.

which sums up the Christian situation before God as well as in this world' (1979: 255). Therefore, slave wo/men who became Christians must have heard this proclamation of freedom as performative rhetoric asserting that among those baptized 'there were neither slave nor freed wo/men' (Gal. 3.28).

Thus, the re-activation of the Aristotelian ethos which maintains socio-political differences of gender, ethnicity and slavery as *natural and therefore unchangeable* differences between women and men, as well as between slaves and freeborn, has to be seen within the context of cultural-political and ecclesial debates and struggles. In this context of struggle, the household-code trajectory can be seen not only as 'Christianizing' the kyriarchal Aristotelian ethos of inequality, but also as humanizing and modifying it by obliging the *pater familias* to exercise love, consideration and responsibility. From the perspective of freeborn and slave wo/men, however, the Haustafel ethos is a serious setback, since it does not strengthen Roman cultural tendencies to manumission and religious claims to equality and mutuality between free and slave wo/men.

By reinforcing the kyriarchal submission of those who, according to Aristotle, must be ruled, and by abandoning their claim to freedom, the early Christian ethos of co-equal discipleship loses its capacity to structurally transform the kyriarchal order of family and state. By adapting the Christian community to its kyriarchal society without taking into account the Roman practice of manumission, the Haustafel ethos opens up the *ekklēsia* to political co-optation by the Roman Empire and, in the process, sacrifices the freedom of slave wo/men. That such a process of co-optation required centuries to complete—and was never fully achieved—speaks for the vitality of the early Christian ethos of coequal discipleship and freedom.

In this kyriarchalizing process, the vision of *agape* and freedom, mutuality and solidarity among Christians gradually becomes transformed from a 'new reality' to mere moral appeal. Slavery, submission and obedience—not freedom, equality and justice—are institutionalized by this kyriarchal scriptural ethos. Since this ethos was not restricted to the household but was also adopted by the *ekklēsia*, Christian faith and praxis ceased to provide a structural-political-religious alternative to the dominant kyriarchal culture of slavery and imperial ethos. The church's preaching of the gospel and its hierarchical-kyriarchal structures became a contradiction that stripped from the gospel of freedom its transforming power in history. Sugirtharajah's hermeneutical and postcolonial approach is a very significant contribution to making conscious this scriptural metaphorization of freedom and slavery. We are looking forward to his insights and challenges in the years to come. *Ad multos annos*, Sugi!

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DIASPORA, BABEL, PENTECOST,
AND THE STRANGERS IN OUR MIDST:
BIRTHING A CHURCH OF RADICAL HOSPITALITY

Eleazar S. Fernandez

I would like to start with a few vignettes of real diaspora experiences to put a face on what appear as cold and, perhaps, numbing statistics. Behind the statistics are lives of real persons who are participants in the massive phenomenon of global migration of peoples. Their stories need to be told so we can understand what we have become as a global society and so we can explore ways to reclaim our social agency in the complex web of global socio-political and economic interactions in which we live. Here is a moment in the life of a person in diaspora:

I never dreamed I would end up a domestic helper in Hong Kong. I had to leave my family because the salary I earned back home would not allow me and my family to live decently. I've been here for more than six years now. I want to return home but I cannot. No job awaits me there... each time I try to start saving [part of my salary], the price of oil at home rises. I am stuck (cited in Ruiz 2007: 39).

Turning to a migrant advocate, she said,

Di ba, Ate? Para akong toilet paper sa tindahan? Kung mabili ka, okay. Kung hindi, diyan ka lang. At pag nabili ka naman, pagkagamit sa iyo, tapon ka na lang. Hindi ka naman kinukupkop (translation: 'Is it not true, Big Sister, that I am like a roll of toilet paper in a store? If I am not sold, I remain on the shelf; if someone buys me, I get used up and thrown away afterwards. I am not cared for') (cited in Ruiz 39).

Many diaspora people around the world share the plight and dream of this nameless Filipina domestic helper, people like Andrea, a sex worker from Sousa, Dominican Republic. Though her immediate circumstances, opportunities, and values may be different from the nameless domestic helper, they both participate in the larger narrative of global diaspora, and they share a common dream of moving out of a miserable situation toward a better life. Denise Brennan describes Andrea's life story of migration in this way:

On the eve of her departure for Germany to marry her German client-turned-boyfriend, Andrea, a Dominican sex worker, spent the night with her Dominican boyfriend. When I dropped by the next morning to wish

her well, her Dominican boyfriend was still asleep. She stepped outside, onto her porch. She could not lie about her feelings for her soon-to-be husband. 'No', she said, 'it's not love...'. Andrea, like many Dominican sex workers in Soúsa, a small town on the north coast of the Dominican Republic, makes a distinction between marriage *por amor* (for love) and marriage *por residencia* (for visas). After all, why waste a marriage certificate on romantic love when it can be translated into a visa to a new land and economic security? (2002: 154).

Veronica, a single mother of a 14-year old boy, shares the plight and dreams of the nameless Filipina domestic helper and Andrea. She lives with her sister and brother-in-law in Mexico City. Like many Mexicans, she dreams of leaving poor Mexico and crossing the northern border into the U.S. '*Pobre Mexico. Tan lejos de Dios y tan cerca de los Estados Unidos*' ('Poor Mexico. So far from God and so near to the United States'), is a common expression on the Mexico–U.S. border (Gill 2003: vi).

In July 2002, she made a decision to cross the border to 'El Norte' with her nephew. They took a bus to Northern Sonora, just south of the Arizona border. With the help of a 'coyote', a paid smuggler, they tried to cross the Sonoran desert. They began hiking late in the afternoon, although the temperature was still above 100 degrees Fahrenheit. There were many potential dangers: untrustworthy coyote, dehydration, heat stroke, poisonous snakes, and the 'la migra' (United States Border Patrol) as well as losing their elusive hopes and all of the money they had invested in their journey.

After hiking all night and much of the day, Veronica began to feel weak and nauseous. She was fighting a pounding headache and could no longer keep up with the group. She had the classic signs of a heatstroke. Her nephew stayed with her, but the rest of the group went ahead. Eventually, Veronica collapsed. Her nephew waited until dusk, when the desert was a little cooler, to carry his aunt in the vague direction he believed would take them to the nearest highway. Someone must have found them because eventually they ended up in the emergency room of a Tucson hospital. More than two weeks after her attempt to cross the border, the Mexican consulate helped to purchase a plane ticket for her to return to Mexico.

While waiting for her flight back to Mexico she was interviewed by Rick Ufford-Chase of BorderLinks, a program that educates people on Mexico–U.S. border issues. 'Knowing what you now know', he asked her, 'would you recommend others try and cross the border without documents?' Veronica was thoughtful about her answer. 'In the end', she whispered, 'I don't really feel like I have any other way to provide my son with the future he deserves. There is no work that will pay me enough to keep him in school, and there is little chance that his life will be any better than my own' (Gill 2003: vii–viii).

Diaspora: A Condition and Discourse

The stories of Veronica, Andrea, and the Filipina domestic helper are just a few of the many true tales of diaspora. Diaspora (*diaspeirō* or ‘scattering of seeds’), in its common and loose usage, is the scattering of people from one place to another. It is often equated with the term ‘migration’. My discourse on diaspora embraces this common notion of migration (regardless of conditions, reasons, and intentions of ‘going home’,—literally or mythically). However, beyond the general notion of migration, diaspora is about the experience of being uprooted, dispersed, displaced, and dislocated as well as the search for roots and connections. Diaspora is also about transnational relations or linkages, either to the original homeland or, laterally, with its counterpart overseas communities across the world. These linkages involve people, money, goods, services, information, and, in particular, religious practices. Diaspora includes as well (im)migrants’ constructions of identity, belonging, home, and what it means to live together in the world that has become, for the diaspora people, not simply limited or bounded by the territory of one’s country of origin. In other words, diaspora is a political discourse, particularly a discourse of resistance. The location of this resistance discourse has ‘shifted’, in Edward Said’s words, ‘from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentered, and exilic energies whose incarnation today is the migrant, and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages’ (1993: 403).

The diaspora of people all over the world has intensified at an alarming rate in recent years. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs reports that in 2005, three percent of the world’s population or 191 million lived in a country other than the one in which they were born. One-third of this population moved from the so-called developing countries or the global South to the global North; one-third moved from the global South to other nations of the global South, and another third originated from countries of the global North (International Migration and Development 2006).

While not a new phenomenon, the massive diaspora of people that we have witnessed in our times is not a simple continuation of the migration patterns from the ancient past or the modern period. Even where continuity in patterns of migration exists and when reasons for migration have not changed, the era of transnational global capitalism calls us to interpret diaspora in significantly new ways. Nation-states still play a crucial role, but it is the global market—through transnational corporations and transnational institutions (e.g. the World Trade Organization)—that has become the major player in the movement of capital, goods, services, and people.

*From Diaspora via Babel to Pentecost:
Journey, Passage, and Vision*

What is diaspora's challenge to our globalized world? Where is it leading us? Toward what possibilities and openings is it luring us? Where do we see these possibilities and openings? How do we prepare ourselves so that we can be more receptive and pro-active in helping to midwife the new world? What imaginative frameworks do we need to transform the challenges into opportunities?

Diaspora, Babel, and Pentecost are three powerful metaphors that, I believe, capture the pain, struggle and hope of diasporized people. To be sure, diaspora is dislocation, disruption, displacement, homelessness and marginalization, but that which is a cause of pain can be a gift to the world. Before it can be a gift, though, the pain of diaspora must undergo the process of transformation and healing; for, as Richard Rohr aptly puts it, 'Pain that is not transformed is transferred' (cited in Yoder 2005: 30). When diaspora pain is reclaimed and transformed, I venture to say that it provides the condition and the possibility for birthing a new tomorrow as envisioned in the Pentecost. But before this birthing can occur, there is also a painful passage that we cannot evade—the deconstruction of Babel.

A familiar image, Babel is a story and a symbol of imperial praxis, centralized organization and cultural homogenization, particularly through a mono-language. It is a symbol of 'settled life' guaranteed by imperial power. But the 'myth' itself of the Tower of Babel is a creation of the diasporized Israelites vis-à-vis the Babylonian imperial myth—the Mesopotamian myth, Enuma Elish. The diasporized people deployed it not to extol the Babylonian lords and their epic achievements but, ironically, to subvert the mono-language discourse or 'univocal linguistic code' of the Babylonian empire (Croatto 1998: 203-223; see also Fernandez 2002). If imperial control can thrive only through maintenance of a univocal linguistic code, then subversion's way must take the form of confusing and disrupting—through various linguistic codes—the empire's communication network. Lest we ourselves get confused, we can be effective in those subversive acts only when we do them with utter clarity, not by adopting a vague and confusing 'obscurantist poco/pomo-speak' regarding 'alterity' and 'difference' that dulls the liberationist edge of postcolonial-diasporic discourse (Taylor 2004: 46).

Diaspora—through the deconstruction of Babylonian univocal linguistic codes and transgression of imperial hierarchical-binary categories—has now created an opening for the realization of the 'originative' polyglossia of Pentecost, which has been aborted throughout history by imperializing projects under various brand names: babelization, hellenization, globalatinization, anglobalization and McDonaldization. Pentecost confronts us with a choice:

Which moral vision will be normative for us? Imperializing Babel or Pentecost? '[W]hat the new diaspora does', in R.S. Sugirtharajah's words, 'is challenge the old Kiplingesque paradigm of East is East and West is West, with no possibility of the two meeting' (2002: 185).

What usually comes to mind when people hear or read about the Pentecost story is the 'miracle of the tongue': the speaking of many languages. Wherever diaspora people are, so are many languages present. In this regard, diaspora has been an agent of the Pentecostal 'miracle of the tongue'. But Pentecost is not primarily a 'miracle of the tongue'. More than that, it is a 'miracle of the ear' (Wink cited in Law 1993: 45-51). If we read the account (Acts 2.6-12) with care, it is really about a miracle of hearing, of understanding, and, therefore, of caring and building a just, abundant, colorful and sustainable tomorrow.

We need to let the opening occasioned by diaspora lead us to the vision of Pentecost by following the clue of the Pentecostal spirit—a spirit that blows and flows wherever it wills, jarring as well as transgressing our fixed, stable, pure, and ordered categories. Perhaps, it is here that hybridity complements diaspora in opening the creative 'Third Space of enunciation' that Homi Bhabha speaks about in order that the vision of Pentecost can be given birth (1994: 37). What I see as the greatest threat, if not already wreaking havoc in our personal lives, *res publica*, and the global commons, is not so much 'social contamination' as it is the defense of hierarchical, exclusionary, and binary categories of the pure against the impure, the stable against the transient, the solid against the fluid, as well as the native against the alien/strange. The 'clash of fundamentalisms' that finds its translation in terrorism and counter-terrorism is but one notorious example (Ali 2002). What hybridity does is to subvert the purist/binary/exclusionary foundation of sinister and violent fundamentalism, both religious and secular.

Diaspora-hybridity offers a way of articulating our longing for and vision of a just, colorful, abundant, and sustainable society (Segovia 1996: 16). Multiculturalism, a model that has gained wider acceptance vis-à-vis the melting pot or assimilation, continues to operate on the assumption of a pure and fixed culture juxtaposed with others and, as is often the case, leaves all forms of socio-economic inequality untouched. Hybridity helps us move beyond assimilation, multiculturalism, 'nativism', or postmodernistic celebration of difference that is oblivious of power relations. It is an antidote to nativism that 'seeks to eradicate any form of impurity in the indigenous culture' and to the 'postmodernist notions of hybridity' that 'tend to sweep under the carpet the cultural and political impact of colonialism' (Sugirtharajah 2002: 194). In this regard, diaspora-hybridity facilitates the aspirations and struggles of the colonized and those who are marginalized by other forms of oppressive practices. It also stands in continuity with liberation movements in their insistence that no amount of postmodernist discursive suturing is enough unless we alter

the reigning social relations of production or, in the words of E. San Juan, Jr., unless we ‘historicize power relations in concrete material conditions of production and reproduction’ (2000: 70; see also McLaren 1997). Though diaspora-hybridity stands in continuity with liberation movements, it is not timid in exposing some of the shortcomings of liberation hermeneutics.

The Church and the Challenge of the Diaspora

Diaspora poses a challenge to how the church must think of itself and how it must respond ethically to its current context, particularly to the presence of the Divine in the form of a stranger. Here, I present the diaspora not simply as someone whom we must see as a stranger who needs our kindness and help, but as someone who calls us to take account of who we are as a church. The diaspora-stranger directs us, as political-ethicist Lester Edwin Ruiz puts it, to the question not only, ‘What is to be done?’ but also ‘Who are we, what [do] we hope for, and where [do] we go?’ or ‘What does it mean to be a people under the conditions of Diaspora?’ (2007: 50). I direct these questions to the church: What does it mean to be a church under the conditions of diaspora? Or, put differently, how shall we reimagine ecclesiology (doctrine of the church) under the conditions of diaspora?

Reclaiming the Church’s Diaspora-Ekklēsia Identity

If the current diaspora phenomenon cannot be understood apart from hegemonic, imperializing, and globalizing powers, the existence of the church also cannot be understood apart from imperializing powers. The existence of the early Christian communities cannot be understood apart from their relation to the imperializing and globalatinizing power of their time—the Roman Empire. If the current massive diaspora is a product of modern imperializing powers and of postmodern emergent empire (Hardt and Negri 2000), the church shares a similar plight. The early Christian communities were diasporized by the Roman Empire, and the contemporary church continues to be shaped by imperializing powers (e.g. the United States) and the predatory global market. Diaspora and the church share common roots as the creation, product, and refuse of imperializing powers. When Christianity opened its young mouth, its language was shaped and informed by empire. If Christian diaspora communities were born in the crucible of empire, then we cannot speak of the church’s beginning outside of imperial condition, and we cannot speak of pre-colonial Christianity.

Even as the early Christian diaspora communities were a product of Roman imperial order, they also stood in opposition to the empire of their time—many times using and mimicking imperial logic while at the same time subverting it. The early Christian diaspora communities were ‘alternative communities’ (*ekklēsiai*) vis-à-vis the Roman imperial order, with roots

in Israel's opposition to the *Pax Romana*. 'Ironical as it may seem', Richard Horsley pointed out regarding the *ekklēsiai* established by the Apostle Paul, 'precisely where he is borrowing from or alluding to "imperial" language, we can discern that Paul's gospel stands counter primarily to the Roman imperial order' (1997: 7).

Of course, as institutions and social movements respond to their environment, self-understanding undergoes change, and the early Christian communities were no exception. When the Christian diaspora communities earned the blessings of a 'settled' life under the auspices of the Roman Empire, they slowly began to lose their diaspora-*ekklēsia* identity. The so-called Constantinization of the church, while a significant moment, is but a part of an earlier and ongoing connection between church and empire. As Joerg Rieger puts it, '[t]he heritage of the church—in all its orthodox and heterodox forms—has been shaped by the intersections of empire and church since the early days' (2007: 72). What this point clarifies is not that all of a sudden the imperial virus infected the pure diaspora-*ekklēsia*, but that from the very beginning it was born in the 'messy middle' and had to wrestle with the presence of empire in its life.

There is no need to rehash in detail the colonization of the church. The colonization process that Franz Fanon speaks about is happening in the church: 'Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it' (1965: 210). In the colonization process the church's diasporic identity was overcome by the 'settled', and its 'originative' polyglossia was overcome, says Catherine Keller, by imperial theo-logos: 'a metaphysical Babel of unity, an identity that homogenizes the multiplicities it absorbs, that either excludes or subordinates every creaturely other, alter, subaltern' (2004: 223). This colonized and colonizing church accompanied imperial conquests and diasporizing projects, and its local converts acted as 'native informants' for the empire. By no means is the colonized and colonizing church over, because it has mutated into new globalizing forms with churches around the world acting as local 'franchises' of global Christianity (Bellagamba 1992: 33).

We need to exhume and resurrect the diaspora-*ekklēsia* identity of the church, if the church is to be true to itself and have a future. When I say exhume and resurrect, I mean making diaspora a permanent posture or marker of the church's identity, not a temporary condition that we hope to overcome someday. This is critical for the healing of the church and for reclaiming the experience of diaspora. When it is perceived as a temporary condition in which the final aim is to 'settle', it is not surprising that the church views the new diaspora a dreaded condition with hurtful consequences (see Volf 1996: 41).

Diaspora, Hybridity, and Church Identity

If diaspora-hybridity points in the direction of a global Pentecost, it also points in the direction of how the church must constitute itself. Sadly, it is true that the day Christians go to worship the one God is still the most segregated day of the week. Though many have joined established congregations, diaspora people are still forming ‘ethnic churches’ or ‘ethnic parishes’ or ‘multinational congregations’ (e.g. Spanish-speakers from different countries of origin), not multicultural-multi-ethnic congregations (Stepick 2005: 20). Yet, to limit the notion of ‘ethnic congregations’ to diaspora congregations is to ‘think white’ (in the setting of the United States), which is to remain oblivious to the fact that white congregations *are* themselves ethnic congregations and that, for many years now, we have been worshipping in ‘ethnic enclave congregations’. Many diaspora people have joined predominantly white ethnic churches, but only to experience being melted or assimilated into ‘white ethnic enclave congregations’. Of course there is a difference between diaspora ethnic churches and dominant white ethnic churches in the way they function in the lives of members. For diaspora ethnic communities, their churches have functioned as a ‘safe space’ that affirms who they are and nourishes them as they face the challenges of a different and not always hospitable world. In this sense, diaspora ethnic congregations may always have their place in society.

Whether diaspora ethnic churches continue to remain or more multi-ethnic or pan-ethnic congregations will be the trend, diaspora-hybridity is creating an opening for the churches to truly become the church of all nations, celebrating difference and seriously taking account of social inequalities. Diaspora-hybridity does not call for the erasure of our distinctive differences, but it opens new possibilities of relationship and partnership in the Body of Christ by transgressing binary-hierarchical categories and by allowing freedom and fluidity. Diaspora-hybridity may be perceived as a threat, to which the common response is wall-building (e.g. nativism) or, in the worst scenario, the annihilation of the diaspora-hybrid—the other (e.g. ethnic cleansing). But diaspora-hybridity has prepared the soil: it has created the conditions for and offered some clues to what it is like to be a church that embodies our plural reality and the vision of Pentecost. Diaspora-hybridity offers a starting point and a way toward the development of what Hannah Arendt calls an ‘enlarged way of thinking’ (1968: 220-21).

The Challenge of the Stranger: The Diaspora Church as a Stranger

Earlier I engaged in a constructive retrieval of the church as a diaspora-*ekklēsia*. I argued that the retrieval of its diaspora-*ekklēsia* identity is crucial for understanding the identity of the church (ecclesiology), which, in turn, is crucial for understanding what the church is called to do (ministry). This time I am advancing the point that being a ‘stranger’ is intertwined with

a diaspora identity. The diaspora is also a stranger or alien/foreigner; the displaced is also a stranger. Hence, the coupling: diaspora-stranger. I claim that being a stranger is constitutive of the church; it is central to its identity. If the church fails to embrace this identity, it will surely fail in its mission and ministry.

The concept of stranger is so central in monotheistic religions (particularly Hebraic and Christian traditions) that the stranger is a classic Other, which is also a classic metaphor for the presence of the Divine. In other words, the Divine has chosen the encounter with the Other or the real flesh-and-blood stranger as a condition for the Divine-human encounter. Put differently, how we see and relate to the stranger, says Marc Gopin, is the litmus test of our faith or to any claim of having encountered the Divine (2006: 6).

We need to recover and embrace the identity of the stranger for the church not as a temporary condition (something we can get over someday), but as a permanent posture. We must do this constructive retrieval with care in order not to diminish the seriousness, the pain, and the life-and-death risk that many diaspora people have suffered because they have been perceived as strangers/aliens. With the above caveat, we need to recover the stranger as an important metaphor for the church because it is central to its very identity and narrative, and it has serious consequences for its ministry. Only through the stranger, not outside of it, can we experience salvation. Outside of the stranger there is no salvation. The stranger/alien is crucial for our liberation from our narrow worldviews, stereotypes, and prejudices; we need more doses of the unfamiliar, the strange, and the discomfiting to help us move into different ways of thinking, dwelling, and acting. I am in agreement with Miroslav Volf that the main issue for the church is not about being a stranger/alien or foreign, but about 'being a stranger [alien] in the *right* way' (1996: 39-40). Our biggest challenge in the era of global market is that we have a church that has become so much at home (naturalized) with the dominant culture that it has lost its prophetic edge. We have a church that has lost its identity as a stranger and has become a 'friend' to the reigning social arrangement.

The Challenge of the Stranger in our Midst: On Hospitality

If 'who the stranger is' is the 'socio-analytical question', Ruiz contends, 'how' we relate to the stranger is the 'ethical' question (2007: 51). The Christian answer to this question is radical hospitality, which is at the heart (*cor* and *coeur* in Latin and French, respectively) of the Christian story. If how we respond to the stranger is a 'litmus test of whether we and our culture have succeeded or not in the eyes of God', the practice of hospitality is the plumb line by which we have to judge our society and ourselves; it is the yardstick by which our moral stature is judged. If, in the spirit of the Reformation,

justification by faith is the article by which the church stands or falls (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*), Arthur Sutherland puts hospitality in a similar spirit: 'Hospitality is the practice by which the church stands or falls' (2006: 83).

Hospitality has, of course, been trivialized. We must not let this trivialization prevent us from reclaiming it. Here I found Henri Nouwen's distinction of the German and Dutch word for hospitality insightful: the German *Gastfreundschaft* emphasizes 'friendship' with the guest, whereas the Dutch *gastvrijheid* emphasizes 'freedom' of the guest (1975: 71). Integrating and re-appropriating these two distinct emphases, Nouwen speaks of hospitality as 'offering a friendship without binding the guest [freedom] and freedom without leaving him alone [friendship]' (1975: 71). In this notion, hospitality is primarily a 'creation of a free space' where the stranger can be at home and be a friend instead of a threat or an enemy (1975: 71). Hospitality is about creating a space for others to breathe, find their own voice, sing their own songs, and dance their own dances. Along with the creation of free space for the guest or stranger, hospitality is also about our openness and humility: it is about receiving the gifts of the strangers, and about opening ourselves so we can truly listen and learn from strangers.

We need to expand as well as go deeper with our notion of hospitality. Hospitality is about the creation of welcoming communities and resistance to practices that are inhospitable. In the context of the predatory global market and imperializing projects that are inhospitable to the needs of the many, hospitality involves critique and subversion of power differentials. Moreover, efficacious hospitality in the context of the predatory global market demands that it be linked to solidarity and resistance or struggle for social transformation, both locally and globally. Often drowned in our enthusiasm for doing something 'good' for the diaspora stranger, we focus on the comfortable question, 'What can we do?' But we often fail to raise the more difficult and necessary question, 'How might *we* be part of the problem?' (Rieger 2004: 214). Even as hospitable acts of charity are commendable, we must move beyond charity toward acts of social justice because the unjust 'table manners' of the global market demands it. For, while 'faith-based charity provides crumbs from the table; faith-based justice offers a place at the table' (Moyers cited by Messer 2005: 88-89).

The Church as a Community of Hospitality

If I argued for the coupling of diaspora and hybridity (diaspora-hybridity) and diaspora and stranger (diaspora-stranger), I contend that we do the same for diaspora and hospitality (diaspora/stranger-hospitality). If the church needs to reclaim the identity of a diaspora-stranger to be true to itself as

a church and be responsive to the needs of our times, I say the same for hospitality. If the church is a creature of diaspora and was born a stranger, so is the church a creature of hospitality, born out of hospitality. Without hospitality there would have been no church. The diaspora/stranger faith communities of the early church were at the mercy of hospitable individuals and communities.

After years of persecuting the early Christians, the Roman Empire presented its version of hospitality to the early Christian communities. It presented itself as a host, if not as a patron and protector of Christianity. The host (imperial Rome) made and held the guest (Christianity) hostage. Its version of hospitality to Christianity was enslaving and suffocating. Imperial Rome did not 'create a free space' for Christianity to be true to itself—to be a stranger. Imperial Rome 'befriended' Christianity and sought to make it into its image.

Of course, the history of imperial powers and dominant cultures making Christianity conform to their image and likeness has continued. Nonetheless, even as Christian communities have been subjected to incessant assault by the powers that be, they have not been completely domesticated, and their notion of radical hospitality is still alive. We need not only retrieve but also nourish this generous and radical hospitality because it is central and formative of the church's identity. When the church opened its young mouth, it cried hospitality, was nourished by hospitality, and practiced hospitality. It was well known for its hospitality. In addition to the preaching of the Word and the breaking of the bread, the early Christian communities experienced remarkable growth, as Montimer Arias noted, because of the extraordinary quality of their hospitality. Arias calls this inviting character and practice of the early Christian communities 'centripetal mission' or 'evangelization by hospitality' (cited in Thompson 2005: 127).

Developing and Cultivating Diasporic Spirituality

The church needs to reclaim and develop not only its diaspora identity, but it must also reclaim and develop a diasporic spirituality. As I said earlier, when the church sees diaspora as a permanent condition, diaspora is converted from being a dreaded condition that must be overcome to a posture of life understood as a journey and characterized by the willingness to take risks and be open to new possibilities. When the church embraces this journey spirituality, it is more able, I believe, to be what it is: free to respond to God's call wherever it is sent because it has not been 'settled' by possessions, wealth, and power. It is free to go, venture and speak its mind without the burden of wealth and possessions because it knows how to live with the generous hospitality of others. Of course, the diaspora church needs material blessings to carry out its ministry, but material blessings are its feet and wings, not a load to carry.

A metaphor of journey is central to diaspora experience and, therefore, to diasporic spirituality. To think of life as a continuing journey is not something given; it is learned and cultivated. It is easy to succumb to a 'settled life' and to become at home in it. The sense of security that a 'settled life' offers is very appealing. On the other hand, a life of spiritual growth is a life that involves movement, the pain of departure and arrival and departure and arrival again, and so on. In the journey we encounter more risks, we are more vulnerable, we are more at the mercy of others, we are surrounded by unfamiliar people, and we face many uncertainties. This is the context in which diasporic spirituality is born: it is a spirituality that has found a home in the journey; a spirituality that has found a home wherever we are. And, if God is everywhere and God is in the journey, then to find a home in the journey is to find a home in God, and God has found a home in us.

Being at home wherever we are, or making every place our home is a crucial and much-needed posture for our world today. As a person in diaspora, I will forever cherish my home 'out there' (Philippines), but I also have found a home in the journey, and I have found a home in other lands. Places where I have had the opportunity to teach (such as Myanmar, Honduras and Cameroon) have a special place in my heart. I still continue to affirm that my mother is the best cook (of course in certain dishes, like the mongo bean soup with *malunggay* [moringa] and *par-ok* [taro leaf with coconut milk and seasoned with shrimp paste]). But I have learned that other mothers are good cooks too, and I have learned to like other foods. I still love to sing the *Bayan Ko* ('My Native Land'), but my diaspora life has been equally nourished by a new song/hymn: 'This is my Song' (tune: Finlandia). In other words, diaspora has taught me how to care deeply for my new home here (United States) even as I continue to care deeply for my home 'out there' (Philippines) and other places in the world. This is an expression of a diaspora heart, a heart that has grown in size: it is a heart whose size is as large as the world. In making the United States my home, I see not only its imperialistic foreign policy but also the real flesh-and-blood people who are starving, bleeding, crying, and laughing. I oppose the war in Iraq, but I also cry when a soldier of the United States is killed, and I am upset at a government that sends soldiers to war but does not take care of them when they return home maimed and/or psychologically devastated. This is what it means, I believe, to have a diaspora heart: a heart that has made every place a home.

Would it not be critical for a church to have this diaspora heart, this diasporic spirituality? Certainly! We need churches whose hearts are as large as the world. We need churches that care deeply for their localities but also care deeply for other places. We need churches whose loyalty is not to a nation-state but to the God in Christ who cares for the whole world, especially those who are dying before their time.

Seeds of Diaspora, Seeds of Hospitality, and Seeds of Hope

It seems apropos to end this chapter with seeds of hope; after all, diaspora is about seeds, particularly seeds scattered. The scattering of seeds happens in various ways, some blown by the wind, some carried by animals, and others by human hands. For those whose lives are deeply 'rooted' to the ocean, like people of the South Pacific, 'drifting seed' (*hoto painu* in Tahitian) has become a natural metaphor for diaspora (Hoiore cited in Pearson 2004: 5). Seeds are tossed by waves and scattered wherever ocean currents take them to various shores, some fertile and receptive while others are not. Many seeds die in transit while others 'take root', survive and even thrive in new locations.

Yes, seeds of hope are diasporized everywhere. They are sprouting and growing in many locations and various spaces. They are in our churches and among Christians who have reclaimed the *ekklēsia*-diaspora spirit. I have seen these seeds of hope among individuals, social movements, and faith-based projects through their services, advocacies, and organizing works. These scattered seeds are alive even among those nipped in the bud by repressive regimes because of their commitment to radical hospitality.

Our challenge is to nurture these precious and fragile seeds, paraphrasing Dawna Markova's words, by refusing to die an unlived life, by risking our own significance, and by turning our lives into a soil, a light, a wing, and a promise, so that what has come to us as a seed goes to the next generation as blossom, and that which has come to us as blossom, goes on as fruit (2000: 1). We must nurture these scattered seeds so they may blossom and bear fruits—bearing fruits in our postcolonial practices that are organically related to our faith communities and people's movements wherever we are finding 'home' and 'taking root' in our current journey.

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SCRIPTURES FOR STRANGERS: THE MAKING OF AN AFRICAN-IZED BIBLE

Vincent L. Wimbush

In what became his famous autobiographical narrative entitled *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African. Written by Himself* (2003)—published first in 1789—Equiano Olaudah describes his own identity as a writer in terms of a ‘stranger’ who attempts to negotiate that part of the North Atlantic world that was mid-to-late eighteenth-century slave-trading, slave-holding Britain. In his first chapter, he dwells primarily on the textures of life in the world from which he was violently torn as a child. He compares aspects of that world of his early childhood—especially some general cultural and religious traditions—to aspects of a so-called Christian Britain. He suggests the possibilities of a genetic relationship between ‘Eboan Africans’ and Jews; and here he first broaches the subject of ‘colour of difference’ and ‘prejudice’ against ‘the natives of Africa’ and finally makes a direct appeal to his readers—white English Christians:

Let the polished and haughty European recollect that *his* ancestors were once, like the Africans, uncivilized, and even barbarous. Did nature make *them* inferior to their sons? And should *they too* have been made slaves? Every rational mind answers, No. Let such reflections as these melt the pride of their superiority into sympathy for the wants and miseries of their sable brethren, and compel them to acknowledge that understanding is not confined to feature or colour. If, when they look round the world, they feel exultation, let it be tempered with benevolence to others, and gratitude to God, ‘who hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth; and whose wisdom is not our wisdom, neither are our ways his ways’ (2003: 45).

At the end of the second chapter he describes his and his sister’s kidnapping, their separation from each other, his traumatic experience of the middle passage, his arrival in Barbados, and his being sold into enslavement. He records that in such a situation he experienced and perceived all things as new, strange, and astonishing, many things as full of ‘bad spirits’ or ‘magic’. Equiano then reflects on a moving memory about others: several brothers who were ‘sold in different lots’ who were crying with full emotion at their

forced separation from each other. Such a scene stirred him at the time and his memory of it stirred him again to the point of addressing directly his white Christian readers again:

O, ye nominal Christians! Might not an African ask you, learned you this from your God? who says unto you, Do unto all men as you would men should do unto you? Is it not enough that we are torn from our country and friends to toil for your luxury and lust of gain? Must every tender feeling be likewise sacrificed to your avarice? (2003: 61).

Both sets of comments reveal much about Equiano and his writing style and strategies. Most significant for consideration for this essay are Equiano's explicit references to Africans. References to his and others' African-ness are very important in the passages quoted above and in other places throughout the story told. After having taken deliberate steps to reference his homeland as the land of 'Ebos'/the 'Eboans' throughout much of Chapter 1, it is somewhat surprising to notice the category 'African/Africans' used at the end of both Chapters 1 and 2. This change in terminology reflects Equiano's interest in presenting a change in his narratological character's self-consciousness—from that of an 'Eboan' to that of an 'African'. This change reflects the change in self-consciousness demanded by the challenges and pressures and new opportunities faced by him and others who were stolen from various tribes in western Africa and made slaves in various places in the North Atlantic worlds.¹ Before being stolen away they had been known and had known themselves by various tribal names and identities; in the new and frightening places and situations of enslavement, there was necessity and opportunity to forge a new identity.

Fashioning Identity

The imposition of names becomes an important theme throughout Equiano's narrative. He makes clear in a fascinating scene the terms on which he came to be called Gustavas Vassa—by force. And his entire narrative makes the point of his arrogation of a right to change that forced name to another—or at least to use another alongside it. Thus, the poignancy of the title of his narrative that includes his double names: 'Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavas Vassa'. The invention and widespread use of the term 'African' by Europeans in reference to the black peoples they had encountered in western Africa advanced Europeans' economic and ideological interests in connection with their slave systems and other forms of domination. Dominance was much better maintained over blacks-made-slaves from widely different tribal and

1. The matter of Equiano's actual place of birth—whether in western Africa or in the United States—is not critical here. What is critical is his self-understanding and self-fashioning.

regional origins and sensibilities and languages and customs by adhering to a form of logic and ideology of power relations that could be pressed into service by and refracted through the one appellation, 'African'. For the sake of maintaining dominance, it is always better to impose a name and identity on the dominated (Long 1986: 2-9).

From the point of view of the black peoples made slaves by the Europeans, the matter of identity formation in slave-trading North Atlantic worlds under traumatic and harsh conditions was, like survival itself—as it continues to be!—enormously complicated and painful, fraught with irony, pathos, and not a little humor along the way (Moses 1978). Equiano tells his story in a way that reflects this fraught history. In the statements quoted above, occurring early on in his story, Equiano steps out of narratological time and inserts his mature voice into the narrative. This insertion was made in order to speak poignantly and directly to the particular issues raised in the respective chapters and in the immediate narrative contexts. It was also done so that Equiano could reaffirm to himself and make clear to the reader the major framing point of his story: that he wrote as one who had been transformed—from (enslaved humiliated) 'Ebo' to (freed Christian) 'African'. What remained to be established was how this transformation had been accomplished and what it should mean to him and to his readers.

On the basis of the facility he developed for reading and writing English, Equiano refracted his new identity as an African through his reading of the Bible. What this entailed was a rather creative and even somewhat bold use of the Bible that effectively pressed it into service as an Africanized Bible, that is, an instrument of his (and others') formation as African Christian. Given (1) the actual social, ideological, and power dynamics that obtained—all decidedly against Equiano and his 'countrymen'; and (2) the very clear privileged relationship that Britain understood itself to have with the Bible, that for Equiano (and his friends) 'even the Bible was made over to 'suit [the African] imagination' (Hurstun 1990: 3) was evidence of Equiano's recognition and understanding of some powerful elements, currents, and realities.

First, Equiano recognized Britain as a biblical formation, as a society that registered its self-understanding through engagement of the Bible. Second, Equiano recognized that such formation was reflective of the work of social invention and 'veiling', that is, the formation work worked insofar as it was not generally recognized. Third, he recognized the possibilities of strategic imitation of the practices that were part of such formation. It is strategic imitation that I think best characterizes and makes understandable Equiano's story and the politics that he and his fellow African Christians followed. It is such politics that I should like to unpack in this essay.

Strangers and Jesus' Mission

I should like to begin with a passage that I understand to be key to Equiano's strategy of imitation. In the context of relating some of the different types of acts of violence and other atrocities that had been perpetrated against blacks throughout the Atlantic systems of slavery, Equiano turns to one type of injustice he had witnessed that was 'frequent in all the [Caribbean] islands':

The wretched field slaves, after toiling all the day for an unfeeling owner, who gives them but little victuals, steal sometimes a few moments from rest or refreshment to gather some small portion of grass, according as their time will admit. This they commonly tie up in a parcel... and bring to town or to the market to sell. Nothing is more common than for the white people on this occasion to take the grass from them without paying for it; and... many others, at the same time, have committed acts of violence on the poor, wretched, and helpless females, whom I have seen for hours stand crying... and get no redress or pay of any kind (2003: 108).

Then Equiano rhetorically pivots from description of the situation and raises pointed emotional questions for the reader:

Is not this one common and crying sin, enough to bring down God's judgment on the islands? [God] tells us, the oppressor and the oppressed are both in his hands; and if these are not the poor, the broken-hearted, the blind, the captive, the bruised, which our Saviour speaks of, who are they? (2003: 108).

This rhetoric is a fascinating conflation of contemporary popular (British) sentiment that draws on many different sources, including the English Bible. There is no doubt that most prominently behind the rhetoric quoted above is sentiment that has its ultimate origins in the New Testament Gospel of Luke, known for the privileging of the poor and oppressed in its redaction of the tradition of stories about and sayings of Jesus. 'He tells us' is a reference to God as God 'speaks' and insofar as the 'word of God' is contained in—what the English considered—the Bible. But as the statement is rendered, the particular source from the Bible is not at all clear. The concept of 'oppressor and 'oppressed' may very well have come indirectly from several different parts of the Bible. The expression 'in his hands' is certainly resonant with biblical stories about God's sovereignty and care, but, as rendered, it seems its direct source seems more likely to be a contemporary popular source, perhaps, some catechetical material or some other popular religious literature. Or it may simply have been a part of the province of popular evangelical rhetorics.

The second part of the passage—with the second question beginning with 'and if these...'—should probably be understood as an effort to point

to how the passage should be related to the immediate context of Equiano's story. I think this question actually draws more directly from the Bible—probably Lk. 4.18-19 reading Isa. 6.1-2—as 'our Saviour speaks of' makes it clear that the source is Jesus of the western canonical traditions. The full power and full implications of this passage is made clear in this saying from Jesus turned into another disturbing question: 'and if these are not the poor, the broken-hearted, the blind, the captive, the bruised, which our Saviour speaks of, who are they?'

'These', in Equiano's context, is a clear reference to the 'negroes' who have been enslaved. Equiano makes clear that they are the ones about whom Jesus speaks as he references those who are the special focus of Jesus' mission. So, according to Equiano, the Bible says the black poor are privileged; they are the focus of special if not exclusive divine attention. No mean rhetorical and ideological trick under the circumstances of black slavery and humiliation: the *white* scriptures are taken up and interpreted and made to mean that God is on the side of the oppressed blacks!

This radical transvaluation of the (British) white scriptures, which before had spoken only to and about British destiny and that was by Equiano and his cohorts was made to speak specifically and exclusively to the black poor and oppressed, represented a type of bold and creative ideology and politics of imitation. The imitation is evident first in his taking up of and practicing scripturalizing itself; namely, reading a text as though in it or through it God spoke about all matters pertinent. As I have already argued at the beginning of this essay, Equiano seemed very much aware of scripturalizing as a complex phenomenon and dynamic associated with the dominant British culture. He showed that he understood how British scripturalizing worked—and what were its effects. For the sake of advancing his causes, he took up such a phenomenon for himself and for those—'the black poor'—with whom he stood in solidarity. This effort represented a highly developed self-reflexivity or 'mimetic surplus' (Taussig 1993: 207-208).

Having associated black slaves as strangers with the 'poor' and 'oppressed' throughout his story (Equiano 2003: 101-112), there can be little doubt that what Equiano was doing was defining black slaves as Christians and, as such, the true focus and legitimate legatees of Jesus' mission. His conversion story in chapter 10 of his narrative, represented—especially with the reference to the Ethiopian figure—every black Atlantic convert. This was indeed powerful cooptation as imitation.

African, British, and Christian

Equiano's larger agenda seems to have involved contributing to (the leadership of) the building of an African Christian diaspora community. Such an effort had as part of its strategy, no doubt complex and multi-pronged, the

practices and work of a 'reading formation' (Bennett 1983); that is, a 'school' or community of readers of the Bible. This strategy was not unlike what Britain on a much larger scale had already become: a society and culture that was a reading formation and, as such, a biblical formation. Of course, the formation of which Equiano was a principal if not the founding figure was obviously and necessarily differently oriented. The 'sons of Africa', as the extant correspondence suggests that he and associates sometimes called themselves, read both similarly to and differently from white Britain. He and his 'school' of black African 'filiative' and 'affiliative' readers (Sudbury 2007: 39-65) read themselves into the same Bible into which the British read themselves. They clearly wanted to be British—'almost Englishmen'—in some significant ways, beginning with political freedom and rights and economic opportunities. But they wanted most pointedly to be British in a different respect; that is, to be African *and* British. This meant that they wanted no so much simply to imitate Britain, but they wanted Britain to be different. Through their bold creative uses of the Bible, 'the sons of Africa' seemed mainly to have wanted—and worked aggressively and courageously for—Britain to reflect their ideology of pluralism.

Near the end of his conversion story (2003: ch. 10), Equiano makes a reference that is critical to an understanding of his Africanist consciousness. He refers to the Ethiopian figure in the biblical book of Acts who is converted to the Christian way. This figure represents for Equiano the integration into western society and culture of the archetypal stranger. And given the reference later in this story to 'my spots'—a collapsed allusion to (1) Ethiopians/Nubians and their skin color; and (2) leopards and their characteristic defining spots—in the prophecy of Jeremiah (13.23), Equiano seemed to have identified himself with the Ethiopian, both in terms of skin color and positionality vis-à-vis the center of society. This identification is decisive: it is the key to Equiano's self-consciousness and self-understanding as a mature writer. He was not merely a black who had been enslaved; he was an African Christian who without qualification represented 'God's children'. His 'spots' were poignantly transformed from being a special mark of humiliation only for blacks to the mere accident of human existence. Through this interpretive prism the reader can see the whole point of Equiano's story-telling: to chart the 'interesting' life journey of one who had been a stranger to one who had become an Afro-British Christian.

Of course, it was tricky business to represent sinful human existence in terms of blackness of skin. The nexus of blackness and sinfulness or humiliation had already been set up in antiquity of the Mediterranean world with some dangerous even devastating social-psychological effects. Some late ancient Christian writers had constructed certain Christian identities at the expense of black peoples (Byron 2002; Hood 1994; Snowden 1970; 1983). And the troping continued and was even extended in theological-doctrinal

arguments and tomes as well as popular discourses throughout Europe well into the modern era (Vercoutter *et al.* 1976–89). Like all black peoples dragged into and made to undergo the European modern era, Equiano had little choice but to engage this tradition of troping the black. But what he did was not merely to turn the sentiment on its head in a direct reversal; he sought to twist it to the point of making it work for him and his associates. He appropriated Luke's construction of the Ethiopian as the outsider and made the Ethiopian into the metonymic convert to the Jesus movement. But he radicalizes the sentiment by making it clear that he does not mean—as white Christians over the centuries meant—to make of the Ethiopian only a symbol of the universal reach of the Christian faith and thereby a figure 'to think with'. He surely was such for Equiano and his comrades. But for him and for them, the figure was poignantly much more. He was also their spiritual *and* physical ancestor. And as such they were in a special relationship with him. He afforded them the opportunity in their own time to be the Ethiopian, to be the black outsider whom the scriptures depicted as belonging to God's family.

The logics, psychology and politics of identification associated with the Ethiopian and applied by Equiano—all converts are Ethiopian, with spots, in spiritual terms; and all oppressed blacks *are* Ethiopians in terms spiritual and physical—were powerful. Through them, Equiano was positioned to make claims for himself and his associates about being included in the Christian nation; and he was also thereby empowered to read and interpret the scriptures with some creative authority. This reading reflects critical political reflection, self-awareness, and a sense of solidarity with some others. It also reflects an identifiable formation and strategy of reading with an equally clear and identifiable agenda.

Equiano's scriptural readings are evidence that his interest had to do with more than merely being included into British Christendom; it had to do also with finding a vehicle for articulating the cries, challenges, and hopes of black peoples finding themselves in the North Atlantic worlds. The scriptures were understood as an important instrument or wedge. They were made to facilitate and sustain a particular 'reading formation' (Bennett 1983); that is, a set of rhetorical gestures in relationship to a set of issues and concerns, a particular way of understanding and addressing the world. I think of Equiano's reading strategy as Africanist, insofar as it threads the Ethiopian figure and what he means through all readings as an African Christian. The scriptures were activated and read as Africanized scriptures.

The activated Africanist reading strategy, I want to suggest, is the most powerful determinant of and the most important key to Equiano's story. It is the most important inspiration for his writing, notwithstanding clear evidence for the felt need on account of where he stood in terms of the major power dynamics and relations to dissemble, deflect, and obfuscate, or

otherwise encode as art of resistance (Scott 1990; Lincoln 1985). It represents Equiano's creative, even playful but critical and serious engagement of different cultural texts and traditions and strategies, as well as his experiences of the more obvious or immediate social-psychological, economic, and political pressures.

Evidence of Equiano's Africanist reading strategy is found throughout his story. Equiano's identification with the Ethiopian and with the 'spots' he shares with the Ethiopian and all humanity told in the context of his conversion story resonates throughout the larger story. Going forward and backward, Equiano both anticipates the conversion story conjuncture and returns to it after the conversion story. The insights and sentiments and experiences of African Christians are registered and made to represent the privileged insights, sentiments, and experiences of black peoples because of the assumption of their association with the Ethiopian figure.

The special or privileged insights are seen in connection with the Ethiopian insofar as he is made to stand for the profound mystery of God's logic in building God's 'family'. All groups are invited into the family. The surety of such inclusion is seen in the Ethiopian figure and in his family, his progeny, among whom are Equiano and the black peoples brought into the North Atlantic worlds. But not many get it. Not many can see or understand what God has wrought and what it means. Not many see or understand that, according to Equiano, it is through the Ethiopian as every African that God designs the future of the world, through the manner in which God's 'family' is constituted. This explains why otherwise upstanding Christians traffic in the enslavement of black peoples.

This seems to be the point of Equiano's pointed but veiled references to readers' understanding—or lack thereof—in connection with his discussion of some implications and ramifications of his conversion experience. Immediately following his comment that the 'worth of a soul cannot be told', he directs himself to the reader: 'May the Lord give the reader an understanding in this' (2003: 191). The connection back to the Ethiopian is clear. He had already referenced the Ethiopian, so in an attempt to comment on its significance he took rhetorical flight: 'Oh! The amazing things of that hour can never be told' (2003: 190). In this context of narration the most important connection is made: what the Ethiopian represents inspires thinking about the 'worth' of a soul—a person. Clearly, what Equiano did was to make the Ethiopian every black person faced with the threat of tribal betrayal and enslavement in the white world, the world in which the black 'soul' was reduced to matters of economic 'worth'. Such consideration was for Equiano the key to understanding the Bible.

The side nod to the reader occurs again—at the end of the chapter including the conversion experience. After having referenced or alluded to Acts 4.12 twice already in this section of the chapter, the verse is actually

quoted in full. And immediately following the quotation, there is another nod to the reader: 'May God give the reader a right understanding in these facts!' On the rhetorical heels of the Acts passage in which the theme of the entire narrative may be said to cohere—regarding the terms and scope of salvation—and occurring most explicitly within the narrative section in which the Ethiopian is featured and in which reference to the 'spots' occurs, Equiano seems here to make the point about the universal scope of salvation. The wink and nod to the reader reflect the special knowledge—shared by a limited few—that black peoples are included in God's family and that no force on earth can undo this situation.

The exegetical use of the somewhat elliptical verse—'To him that believeth, all things are possible, but to them that are unbelieving, nothing is pure' (Tit. 1.15)—follows the wink and nod to the reader after the quotation of the Acts passage and reflects in disturbing terms what is at stake for Equiano. In this context of argument, who would be among the 'believing' but black peoples and those who are convinced that black peoples are among those who are saved? And who are the 'unbelieving' but those who do not believe that black peoples are worthy of being saved? Within the former group the reigning sentiment must be that 'all things are possible'; that is, the inclusion of blacks in God's economy of salvation means that God can do all things, so seemingly odd, impossible, nonsensical things are possible. Within the latter group the sentiment must be that 'nothing is pure'; that is, the prospect of blacks in the economy of God's salvation means that the traditional systems, laws, rules, expectations, and beliefs no longer apply, so chaos and fear must then be thought to ensue. Equiano would seem with this passage to be communicating a bit of hard-hitting sarcasm in order to level the discursive playing field.

Reading Formation and Reading Identity

Whom did Equiano have in mind to address? Who will pick up on his wink and nod? The most radical among the white evangelicals reading the story? But it would take a radical conversion—not merely from 'sin' in the conventional moralizing sense, but from the 'sin' of a racialized and racist society, a tall task indeed—for such folk to get the point made. Why should Equiano's winking and nodding not have been intended for the real and/or imagined(?) black convert who, like Equiano himself, would constitute a small reading formation defined by a 'right understanding' of matters having to do with salvation and slavery? Equiano's coded language and his gestures toward his fellow African Christians and their common understanding of the world constituted the 'right understanding' about the worth of every human soul and, at the same time, represented the wedge principle by which the Bible was interpreted.

Equiano's fellow African Christians were in evidence both within and outside his narrative. He indicates clearly that he was often found expressing his solidarity with enslaved Africans in the new world. They were, he argued, among those who, although not learned in European letters, nonetheless possessed understanding. The conviction that 'understanding is not confined to feature or colour' (2003: 45) was in an era of slavocracy and of humiliation of black peoples quite radical. As the final statement of Equiano's first chapter rather dramatically intones—a blending of a quotation from Acts 17.26 and 1 Corinthians 1–2—God, 'who hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth... and whose wisdom is not our wisdom, neither are our ways his ways'—had inverted the normal worldly scheme and regime of valuation and hierarchy. This means that the 'rude and uncultivated' (Equiano 2003: 45) Africans are privileged.

At sea again as steward aboard a ship called the *London*, Equiano found himself in May of 1785 in Philadelphia (2003: ch. 12). There he visited a community of Quakers and took great joy in how they treated 'my oppressed African brethren' (Equiano 2003: 224). He made it clear that he was especially pleased to see that they had begun there a 'free-school' for 'every denomination of black people' (2003: 224). Equiano addressed the impact of the school in terms of making such folk 'useful members of the community' (2003: 224). Doubtless this was the understanding of the impact of initiative held by the Quakers themselves.

The scriptural quotation at the end of the discussion about the school was most interestingly included in the pointedly disturbing question addressed to readers about the planters in the Caribbean: 'Does not the success of this practice say loudly to the planters, in the language of scripture—"Go ye, and do likewise?"' (Equiano 2003: 224). The source of the quotation is Lk. 10.37, the famous Good Samaritan story. So here Equiano equates the planters to powerful insider (i.e. Jewish) officials in the scriptural story who pass by those in need without offering aid. The Quakers then would seem to figure in Equiano's mind as the beneficent outsiders represented by the Samaritans.

But I think more was at issue for Equiano—perhaps, more than he thought himself allowed to express openly. Why was this particular example of Quaker altruism so important to Equiano? Why the direct biblically inspired exhortation to slave-holding planters to imitate the Quakers? Did he really think that such planters would be moved by his exhortations through the Bible? Did he think that the planters as a group would think it reasonable or wise or economically advantageous to found schools for those they enslaved and depended upon for their livelihood? Did he assume that the planters would view a black mind as a terrible thing to waste?

Immediately following the narrative about the Philadelphia school, Equiano includes information that points to his thinking and to aspects of

the larger social dynamics. He makes mention of and actually records a letter 'presented' in October 1785 to Quakers in England from 'some of the Africans' (2003: 225). The letter is important both as an event and in terms of its content: it reflects, among other things, the existence of a group of literate, articulate, and politically active self-identifying blacks in solidarity with each other, and it reflects their aggressive advocacy for 'the poor, oppressed, needy, and much degraded negroes' (Equiano 2003: 225). It reflects their activism, agency, and social power, in spite of their circumscribed circumstances. And it suggests that the activism, agency, and power demonstrated by their literacy was enabled by some sort of association or formation or 'school', possibly inspired by the Philadelphia free-school.

The letter leads me to suspect a double twist in the narrative. On the surface of the text, the (white) reader was made to be the addressee of the exhortation to 'go and do likewise'. But the reader is also made to be a substitute for the distant planters. Both the reader and the planter are made to stand in for black peoples who are indirectly exhorted to 'go and do likewise'; that is, to school themselves for the sake of achieving results similar to those Equiano observed in Philadelphia.

My suspicion that Equiano was actually more interested in winking and nodding to fellow blacks, or in addressing them in some way, is heightened by the difference I detect in the language about the interests of general readers and planters, on the one hand, and the actual agency and activism represented in the letter written by the Africans on the other. The general readers of Equiano's story, like the Quakers of Philadelphia and England as well as the distant planters, are assumed to be interested in the cultivation of minds and virtue and 'useful' existence of black peoples. But the letter presented by Equiano and seven others on October 21 1785 to 'the gentlemen called Friends or Quakers, in Whitehart-court, Lombard Street' (2003: 296 n. 629) in London reflected a different set of interests. This letter of Equiano and company reflects a group less interested in demonstrating themselves as 'useful members of the community'—the constant concern of dominants about the dominated—than in coming into speech on their own terms, including arrogating to themselves the right to self-ascription—'We, part of the poor', 'we, as a part of those captivated, oppressed'—advocating on behalf of the oppressed, and asserting their worth and dignity as human beings.

The larger agenda of the letter written to the Quakers is important here. It was written as a group response to the antislavery 'book' written by Anthony Benezet entitled, *A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and her Colonies in a Short Representation of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes*. Originally published in Philadelphia in 1766, it was reprinted and re-titled in London in 1767. It was printed and distributed by Quakers throughout England, especially to clerics and government officials. So it was likely a

fairly well-known publication in the 1780s (2003: 296 n. 628). It should be noted that the first paragraph of the letter, in which the writers name and express their praise for the tract because of the attention it turns to the plight of their 'brethren', repeats some of the terminology about black peoples found throughout the tract. Both the letter and the tract refer to blacks as 'poor, oppressed... negroes' and 'heavy burthened negroes'. The use of 'negroes' in the tract is worth noting. But in the second paragraph, in which the writers pivot to their specific request, the language of self-description changes—to 'the afflicted', '[God's] creatures', 'the oppressed', 'those captivated, oppressed, and afflicted people'. So beyond the discursive frameworks of dominant whites (including those of the sympathetic Quakers), the black writers view and name themselves differently and on terms that they deem more appropriate.

The very fact of the letter writing and the comment on the tract written by Benezet establishes Equiano and the others in his circle as engaged, critical, self-possessed, and self-reflexive readers and writers. For the times and the situations in which most black peoples found themselves, this was astounding enough. It also suggests that Equiano and the other writers constituted a discursive and reading formation, perhaps, even a 'school', of blacks that used a complex of expressions and categories in much the same way, intentionally communicating and advancing positions and a type of politics. Certainly, the way Equiano refers throughout his story to blacks as oppressed Africans is significant. The descriptors and the general use of language suggest that Equiano and his circle were trained by common tutors and/or trained themselves to read and engage in discourse with common voice on what was going on in the world that impinged on the existence of black peoples.

The fruits of the training can be seen most dramatically in Equiano's other extant writings, mainly letters (Equiano 2003: Appendix E). Some of the letters were written by him alone, others have circle authorship.

In a letter dated December 15, 1787 and addressed to Granville Sharp as an expression of thanks for his advocacy of black people, Equiano (aka Gustavus Vassa) was among the several signatories (Equiano 2003: Appendix E: 3). The writers styled themselves 'sons of Africa', 'descendants of the much wronged people of Africa'. They understood themselves as spokespersons and advocates for 'our brethren and countrymen unlawfully held in slavery'.

On July 15, 1788, a letter was addressed to William Dolben, leader of the successful fight in Parliament that year to pass a law addressing the overcrowding of slave ships (Equiano 2003: Appendix E: 12). Signed by some of those who were signatories to the letter sent to Sharp—the 'sons of Africa'—this letter was sent to *The Morning Chronicle* and *London Advertiser*. The letter was an expression of gratitude to Dolben for his motion to alleviate the miseries of 'our unhappy brethren on the cost of Africa'. It also

expressed hope that the small community of freed ‘persons of colour’ would return Dolben’s gesture by behaving ‘with sobriety, fidelity, and diligence in our different stations’, whether remaining in England or returning to Africa or to the ‘West India islands’. The concluding point was that in ‘feeling for their kind’, they were ‘not ignorant’ of the importance of an assumed pact that ‘our whole race’ pledged in covenant with Dolben and his kind—to ‘merit, by dutiful behavior’, support.

Similar letters were sent, also on July 15 1788, and also via the newspapers, to the Right Honourable William Pitt and the Right Honourable Charles James Fox. These letters were also signed by the group—six men, ‘ourselves and Brethren’—that had sent the letter to Dolben. Not much more is added to the expression of thanks for support of ‘our unhappy race’, ‘our kind’.

On April 25, 1789, a letter was published in *The Diary; Or Woodfall’s Register* (Equiano 2003: Appendix E: 18). It was addressed to William Dickson, ‘formerly Private Secretary to the Hon. Edward Hay, Governor of the Island of Barbados’, a subscriber to Equiano’s book. Hay was author of *Letters on Slavery... To Which Are Added, Addresses to Whites, and to the Free Negroes of Barbadoes...* (1789). This letter, also written by ‘sons of Africa’, was of the same genre as the other letters. It was an expression of thanks to Dickson for the light his book cast on slavery and the regard shown in it ‘for the poor and much oppressed sable people’. It also offered brief opinion on Dickson’s book. The writers stated that they thought the book had provided ‘too just a picture of the Slave Trade, and the horrid cruelties practiced on the poor sable people in the West Indies, to the disgrace of Christianity’. They expressed hope that the book would lend support to ongoing efforts to pass legislation to stop the slave trade.

It is worth noting some of the letters Equiano wrote by himself during this period. They reflect the same expressions, sentiments, and politics as the letters signed by the ‘sons of Africa’. They suggest Equiano’s leadership within the circle of the ‘sons of Africa’. One of the most fascinating of the letters Equiano wrote by himself was one addressed to Raymund Harris and published in the *Public Advertiser* on April 28 1788 (2003: Appendix E: 8). The occasion for the letter was the very recent publication (1788) of Harris’s controversial book entitled, *Scripture Researches on the Licitness of the Slave Trade, Shewing its Conformity with the Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion, Delineated in the Sacred Writings of the Word of God*. An ideological hired gun for the slave traders in and around Liverpool, ‘Harris’ was paid 100 pounds for his pro-slavery work. A Jesuit of Spanish background, his real name was Hormasa. Dedicated to the mayor, recorder, aldermen, bailiffs, members of the Common Council of the borough of the slave-port that was Liverpool, the bold apology for the slave trade provoked heated responses from a number of quarters.

Harris indicated that he was examining whether the slave trade had the ‘sanction of divine authority’; he aimed to ‘try the merits of the present controversy by the Sacred Canons of the Written Word of God’ (Harris 1788: vi-vii). He shrewdly indicated that the several relevant scriptural passages that he researched were taken from the (English!) Protestant Vulgar Translation of the Bible ‘most generally received in these Kingdoms’ (1788: vii). His ‘researches’ led him to conclude that the English Bible gives legitimacy to the slave trade, notwithstanding infractions and cruelties here and there:

Since the Sacred Writings of the Holy Bible contain the unerring Decisions of the Word of God... it follows necessarily, that, as there can be no pre-scription against that Authority, which... has positively declared, that the Slave-Trade is intrinsically good and licit... however contrary such declaration may be to the received opinion of some men (1788: 75).

Equiano’s letter was a full-throated critical review of the book. It seems likely that he wrote, if not in direct response to the prompting or request of others (fellow ‘sons of Africa’ or, perhaps, white evangelicals and other types of abolitionists), then at least with their emotional and ideological-political support. Equiano signed his name as ‘Gustavus Vassa, The African’. Clearly, he intended that his readers understand that he wrote as an African Christian—as one who was capable of participating on the basis of his literacy the discourses of British Protestant Christianity. His stance within such a culture—of readers of the Bible—further identified him with a particular orientation and set of assumptions; namely, as one who reads and understands the center-ing texts in a way that makes clear that God’s work in the world now includes, even privileges, oppressed black peoples. Being an African Christian meant for Equiano that he was empowered along with other Christians to engage important public issues. So he meets Harris’s arguments using the Bible in support of the slave trade with his own arguments using the Bible against the trade.

But Equiano does not simply respond to Harris’s argument from the Bible by countering him with different passages from the Bible. He does indeed do some of that. He argued more than once that Harris had gotten basic things wrong; that is, Harris had ‘wrested St Paul’s words’ out of context (2003: Appendix E: 8). But precisely because of his understanding of the work that the British people made the Bible do for them, Equiano’s strongest offensive tactic involved establishing Harris’s motives and interests in relationship to what or how some of the characters of the Bible signified. Because Harris had recognized Paul’s writings on slavery as the most important sites within the site that was the Bible for thinking through the issue of slavery, Equiano also made them so for his rhetorical argument.

For example, in reading Harris’s reading of the New Testament letter to Philemon, in which Paul appealed to Philemon (a Christian who was also a slave master) to receive Onesimus (a believer who was also a slave who

had run away from Philemon) as ‘brother’, Equiano questioned the cogency of Harris’s reading not on the basis of so-called historical background facts or strict exegetical-philological analysis, but in terms of narrative-character identification and what such identification suggests. In Equiano’s view, Onesimus is the character in Paul’s letter to Philemon with whom the reader should identify. As the runaway slave, Onesimus is seen as the basic Christian figure. Just as the Ethiopian figured the radical expansion of Christian hope, so Onesimus figured the radical nature of Christian freedom from all forms of worldly oppression, humiliation, and enslavement. Harris’s misreading, according to Equiano, involved his not reading Paul’s text with and through Onesimus as the figure of radical Christian freedom. Reading the Bible in this way, as an African text, should have led Harris to understand that as Onesimus—as a Christian—must be free, so the British slave trade and slavery itself must be viewed as anti-Christian.

Conclusion

Equiano’s reading implied that the Ethiopian was Onesimus and Onesimus was the Ethiopian, that black peoples were part of God’s family, even the poster-tribe for such. They were privileged insofar as they were those who were metonymic of the ‘strangers’ of the world. Who other than the black slave signified so dramatically the stranger (Hartman 2007: 3-18)?

Throughout his narrative Equiano identified himself as ‘stranger’. His status as ‘stranger’ is overcome only as he defines himself as African Christian. And he showed his African Christian self-understanding through his reading that was his recontextualized reading of the Bible as an Africanized Bible. From such reading there are compelling implications remaining to be explicated and powerful ramifications to be acted on.

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ON WALKING THROUGH THE CEMETERY: CONTINUITY AND TRANSFORMATION IN READING DEATH IN AN INDIAN-CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

J. Jayakiran Sebastian

I blossomed and I withered
Without even time to arrange a decent funeral for me
People who'd left the body are returning to the body
And I am fighting for air (Dhasal 2007: 108).

Inclusive, flexible identities allow for multiple belongings. When group boundaries overlap one can belong to more than one without compromising oneself and find room enough to adjust to their various claims, e.g., of one's family by birth, by marriage, by adoption.... If conversion is understood as process and change, as tolerance and dialogue, if exclusive and rigid religious identities of individuals and communities yield to more inclusive and flexible ones, then multiple belongings are possible, and indeed necessary (Heredia 2007: 332).

Unlike German theologians fed on the diet of the Enlightenment, Indians took it for granted that myths were devised to deal with the human mess and to cope with a certain types of event, from natural disasters to personal tragedies (Sugirtharajah 2008: 138).

Recollecting, Revisiting, and Resignifying

The provocative and influential ideas of R.S. Sugirtharajah have fostered not just a major upheaval in the way postcolonial theory has impacted the academy, but in many and diverse ways have also led to a reappraisal of the praxis of ministry in local situations. It is with a deep sense of gratitude for what his ideas and friendship mean to me that I wish to revisit the Udamalode congregation of the Gauribidanur Pastorate of the Karnataka Central Diocese of the Church of South India, the place where I began my pastoral ministry in 1984.¹ This is a place to which I constantly look back with gratitude and wonder; gratitude because of what the people there taught and

1. A further matter of appreciation to Sugirtharajah comes because of his invitation to contribute to the volume celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the publication of *Voices from the Margin*. I focused on this community in my essay; see Sebastian 2008c.

continue to teach me, and wonder because of how they continue to struggle with issues regarding economic deprivation in a rapidly changing world and adapt to new opportunities for economic betterment; gratitude for opening their hearts and lives to me, and wonder as to how much twenty-first century Christianity has to learn from these hardy people, living since the turn of the twentieth century in this 'Christian colony' outside the town of Gauribidanur, fifty miles from the city of Bangalore.

Today, as one walks down from the edge of the town and approaches the colony, the first thing that meets your eye is the new church, gleaming white, almost incongruously emerging out of the fields, many of which are baked brown and bone dry, since they depend on the rains for water, and more often than not, experience the reality of yet another drought. This particular church did not exist when I went there more than twenty years ago. It was built after the retired village school teacher, an older woman called Prakashamma (who had often welcomed me to her small home and realizing that the city boy was far from home and hungry, went inside and made me a hot chappati which was always welcome and appreciated) chose death through setting herself on fire a couple of years after I left, for reasons still not clear to me. In her dying moments she asked family members around her to use the money from her pension and other retirement benefits to build a new church, which they not only did, but, in addition, also gave of their labor and time, being for the most part masons, electricians, painters, and carpenters. The church now has a small plaque which bears her name and states the bare fact that it was through her initiative that the new church building came to be. I am getting ahead of myself and the death theme has already insinuated itself into the discourse. No, when I first went there it was the cemetery that first met my eyes as I walked through the fields toward the village. It was a rustic cemetery, where most of the mud graves were gradually crumbling. Several families had marked 'their' graves with dabs of whitewash, and occasional cement crosses and weather-beaten wooden crosses tried to testify to the stories that lay buried underneath.

In the middle of all this, at that time, there was only one grave which not only had a proper marker but also a small wall all around. The metal marker read: 'In memory of Edmund Arthur Snuggs, Welsh Reg[iment], aged 32 y[ears], died 2 June 1906'. The congregation had lovingly tended to this grave, and it was evident that it had received careful attention. The story goes that this soldier, knowing that his end was near and far from a military base, asked that he be buried where some Christians lived. His wishes were honoured and there he lies a hundred years on, providing us with a clear time-frame as to when this congregation was organized. His grave, far removed from the grandiose imperial monuments and artifacts from the age of empire, also forces us to take into consideration the complications

involved in resignifying the life and death of those who decided to follow the religion of the empire.

The oral tradition talks about a group of Christians in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, moving at the end of the nineteenth century in search of better living conditions to Karnataka, how they set up camp and immediately built a thatched-hut to serve as their place of worship, and how a lay doctor, R.A. Hickling, from the nearby town, Chickballapur, on a trip through the countryside on his horse, was delighted to discover a 'ready-made' group of Christians. He bought a large plot of land, which was divided into three clear segments: the cemetery, the place where individuals could build houses, and the fields behind this. The people clearly told me that one of the reasons as to why this was situated away from the town was that they 'killed and ate cows', reason enough for this group of Dalit Christians to be assigned to the periphery of the town, out of sight.²

As pastor, I was constantly invited to conduct 'prayer meetings' remembering family members who had died. Some of these were connected with deaths that had taken place recently; there were remembrance prayer meetings on the seventh, eleventh, fortieth, and at the end of a year. There were also prayer meetings to be conducted for those who had died a long time ago. People told me that they had had a dream of the deceased person, and, in response, wanted a prayer meeting held. As a young and energetic pastor, I made it a point to find out as much as I could about the person in whose memory the meeting was being held, so that I could preach a 'relevant' sermon. I took a lot of time and trouble to find what I considered appropriate Biblical passages. The meetings generally followed a predictable pattern. People would slowly gather and engage me in conversation, time did not mean much and was stretched out, some young people started singing bhajans and lyrics, excited children ran around everywhere, along with the stray dogs, and most resisted any attempt on my part to begin the proceedings. It was only when the cooking being done nearby was judged completed to the satisfaction of those in charge that the prayer meeting could begin.

After the singing, reading, reminiscing, and preaching, the next stage was that of eating. As time went on I realized that there was something going on—the immediate family members left me with the children and other congregation members, with puffed rice to keep us company, and vanished for some time. As I started asking questions and trying to find out what was going on, I was told that the family members had taken a portion of the food that had been prepared and gone with it to the cemetery to offer it at the grave of the one in whose memory the prayer meeting had been held. Once they returned, we would proceed with the business of eating. Although I

2. There are passing references to this place and the congregation in Sargent 1987.

conducted dozens of such prayer meetings during my time in Gauribidanur, never once was I invited to be part of the procession to the cemetery. Further probing revealed that it was not because they were in any sense ashamed of what they were doing, but that this was something they believed important in terms of their inherited customs and practices. However, being unsure of where it fitted in with their Christian heritage and the response of the church authorities, they thought it best to have the prayer meeting with its food component juxtaposed with the food component at the cemetery, but keep the officiants apart—the pastor for the first part and the immediate family for the second. On being pressed as to what they actually did, I was told, without any evasion, that they placed the food on the grave, spent a short time standing around, and returned to participate in the meal at home.

In the context of understanding death, this raises several issues of continuity and change regarding Indian-Christian converts:

- a. To what extent did they create for themselves an ‘imagined’ past in terms of continuity with the background from where they came?
- b. How was this constructed? In terms of ‘remembering’, what had been done? Or in terms of ‘imitating’, what their Hindu neighbors were doing?
- c. Was there a process of ‘sanskritisation’ where Dalit communities were evolving their own forms of so-called ‘Brahminical’ rituals, or was there a level of continuity with what they had already been accustomed to doing?³
- d. How did this combination affect the interconnections between their inheritance and their self-understanding of being Indian hyphenated Christians?
- e. To what extent did they experience the ‘pressure on the hyphen’ (Sebastian 1997; Lott 2005: 309-322) as they sought to adapt the possibility of valorizing death within their own interpretative frameworks?

3. These possibilities, which need to be investigated in much more detail, raise interesting issues in India today, facing the reality and consequences, including violence, of the Hindutva project. When religious conversion and social realities are introduced into the mix that also contains the elements of desire and identity formation, what are the possible outcomes? Sumit Sarkar notes: ‘The votaries of Hindutva have tended to come in the main from high castes quite self-conscious about their status privileges, and yet the conflicts that tended to emerge from hierarchical rigidities needed to be resolved or kept in check if unity was to be achieved.... There were... uneasy oscillations between volubility and deliberate silencing through diversion, between projects of limited, integrative, Sanskritizing reform and aggressive assertions of hierarchy’ (2005: 277). The question that needs to be asked is: When identity formation evolves through desire and not through political expediencies or coercion, how is the larger project of the dominant served or subverted by such movements?

I approach this task of trying to understand how Indian-Christian communities came to terms with the reality of death, by arguing that the reception of Christianity provided enough space to negotiate this certainty without jettisoning the beliefs of their past. In this sense there was a conversion of death, not necessarily in the way in which the missionaries and the pastors who interacted with these communities would have envisaged it, but nevertheless a conversion where death made sense. A perceived and practiced flexibility in dealing with the actuality of death allowed the communities to remain faithful to the Christian way of life. Where claims are made that Christianity had to be accepted as a fixed package or a take-it-or-leave-it religion, these negotiations remind us of how local communities accepted and yet subverted the hierarchical expectations and demands, and ‘transformed the religion of the Roman Mediterranean in ways beyond recognition’ (Sebastian 2008b: 263).⁴ I am aware that I am making large claims here and am content to leave the task of interacting with my main argument to those more familiar with situations in other parts of India, but here I would like to offer some methodological points with regard to the ongoing quest to foster the emergence of Dalit theology, then return to the experiences at Gauribidanur, and offer some comments as to ways of proceeding on this path of trying to understand how these communities literally, pragmatically, religiously, sociologically, and culturally ‘converted death’.

Reimaging, Reimagining, and Rerepresenting

In a major article interrogating the methodology of Dalit theology (Sebastian 2008a), I made the following points:

First, Dalit theology, which at one stage was accused of being a narrow theological ‘ism’, of relevance only to those who had the ‘pathos’ experience, or were in empathetic or sympathetic agreement with it, draws its strength from the rich and complex inter-connections with the methodological possibilities thrown up by epistemological inquiry in the spectrum of fields of knowledge. In other words, the strength of Dalit theology lies precisely in the possibility of its inter-disciplinarity, something that needs to be acknowledged and fostered.

Secondly, Dalit theology is a theology that is in constant quest of defining, refining, interrogating, forming, and re-forming/reforming the identity question. Rather than merely affirming simplistic and essentialist myths of origin, Dalit theology constantly searches for that existential yet elusive

4. This forms the conclusion of Sebastian 2008b. Again, in this article, I have drawn many examples of how the Bible was ‘used’ from my experiences among the people of Gauribidanur Pastorate.

element, identity, which offers a fertile possibility of understanding the self, leading in turn to the interrogation of those forms of self-understanding that, very often, have been constructed or imposed.

Thirdly, the traditional understanding/s of religion, religious practices, the 'why' of conversion, religious 'objects', the instrumentality of worship and the liturgy, the importance given to the mediation of priests and those believed to have access to the numinous, have to be investigated using methodological tools which recognize that so-called academically 'respectable' modes of inquiry not only have serious built-in shortcomings and overt and covert 'prejudices', but that such modes of inquiry are deliberately skewed against the knowledge-praxis of the modes of inquiry of those marginalized communities, whose very marginalization was actively promoted by such 'scholarship'.

Fourthly, in so far as Dalit theology has systematically questioned all attempts at theological reductionism, the ongoing challenge is that of continuing to fearlessly speak the 'truth' to power, without succumbing to the dictates of mere fashion, without simplistic mimesis, without pandering to the desires of the dominant, and without overlooking the intra-Dalit dynamics. Apart from this *via negativa*, Dalit theology should affirm what it has always been—a way of living, of praying, of relating, of questioning, a way that is not a bypass, but a way that is itself the way of truth.

Having set out these assertions and laid out the outline that forms the basis for making these assertions, let me reiterate how much this exercise has derived from the walk through the cemetery in the form of a series of questions:

- a. In our desire to locate conversion narratives in terms of the search for a new way of life, a desire for social equality, the attempt to get away from the structures of the past, the search to break out of caste constraints, have we lost sight of how important an integrative reading of death really was?
- b. Was Christianity attractive to Dalit communities precisely because it valorized death? Death with dignity was not just a slogan, but something that such communities experienced time and again—not simplistically in terms of a dignity available in a projected life after death, but dignity in terms of the ceremonies connected with death, not just at the time of the funeral, but even afterward, in terms of the memorialization of death.
- c. Was the perceived 'flexibility' in the praxis of Christianity something that satisfied the desire for continuity with the real or imagined past? In other words, did the appeal of Christianity lie precisely in what it 'allowed' (whether its immediate proponents like missionaries or catechists or pastors denounced such practices or not)?

- d. Did the acceptance of Christianity create space to construct a new identity, an identity which drew on past desires and new imaginings, an identity in which reverence played a major part?⁵

Reevaluating, Revitalizing, and Re(c)entering

This series of questions and comments serve to bring us back to the issue of valorizing death. Constructing an 'imagined past' serves the people of Udumalode in various ways. While conversion may have helped in offering them the possibility of becoming part of a new story or another spiritual narrative, the construction of meaning in death, the meaning of death, and meaning through rituals associated with death, in the new community offered them the possibility of rereading their own experience, especially how they in their bodies had been made to imbibe the bitterness of the culture of death. It is precisely at the point where their existence reached its nadir, at the point of extinction of life, that meaning was sought and constructed. I find it interesting and instructive that while being enveloped with the language and descriptions of eternal life, heaven, and the promise of resurrection, the people in the Christian colony creatively conjoined and sought enhanced meaning through inserting themselves into the memory of what they evoked in terms of the behavior of the dominant groups which in various ways had excluded them from social and religious participation, and made this part of what they found to be central to self-identity through the ingenuous displacement and reappraisal of biblical imagery, now put in the service of valorizing death.

Sathianathan Clarke has demonstrated that '[t]he productivity-based collective life style of Dalit communities in India instructs us that a new approach for locating and investigating the implosions of the Christian gospel is needed: the textualities that encode Dalit culture are multimedia in form' (2001: 190; see also Clarke 2002). Anything that is 'multimedia in form' defies easy classifications and simplistic explanations. So where did and does all this leave me—bewildered and not in a position to comprehend? Yes, certainly, but also profoundly shaken and stirred, exhilarated and apprehensive. Will I easily fall into the trap of over-eagerly representing and not allowing the subaltern to represent themselves? Possibly. Am

5. Paul Woodruff writes: 'Religions have faded, religions have been displaced by violence, religions have fractured; but ceremony and reverence live on. Ceremony is older than any surviving religion, and wherever there has been ceremony, there has been a way of taking ceremony seriously, and that requires reverence' (2001: 54). For the people at Gauribidanur, as I have indicated, the ceremonies connected with death drew from multiple sources into a creative mix which offered them meaning at manifold levels.

I filled with some kind of zeal to allow the subaltern to speak, but through my voice? Perhaps. Is it that through this act of writing that I am trying in a small way to pay a portion of the debt that I owe to those who transformed me in ways that I have inadequately appreciated? Undoubtedly. Can I now turn away and move on to other things, leaving them behind? No, for what they have been and what they are, has been and is a gift that is constantly giving.

Coming as I did from an urban setting, where, to a large extent in my home congregation, St Mark's, a former Anglican church, now the cathedral of the Diocese, death had been domesticated and sanitized, along with strong traces of the stern Calvinism coming from the heritage of the Basel Mission which formed my family 'mission' history, the weight and expectation placed on a young pastor, fresh out of seminary in an unfamiliar setting, could have been a disheartening and perplexing experience, especially as I 'did' my first funeral—that of an ninety-year-old lady, full of years but devoid of life, whom we buried in the cemetery that I have described, late in the evening, the scene lit up with burning pieces of firewood held up by eager hands, standing at the edge of the open grave and fumbling with the cumbersome and ponderous phrases of the prayer book. However, this was the moment when I realized that the weight of expectations on me to make sense, however improbable or consequential, of the mystery of life and death, was not a burden that I had to bear alone, but that the task of interpreting and interrogating the gift of death was, and has always been, a shared and cooperative venture. Derrida offers a sense of this collective when he writes:

We would need to make new inroads into thinking concerning the body, without dissociating the registers of discourse... in order to one day come closer to what makes us tremble or what makes us cry, to that *cause* which is not the final cause that can be called God or death... but to a closer cause; not the immediate cause, that is, the accident or circumstances, but the clause closest to our body, that which means that one trembles or weeps rather than doing something else. What is it a metaphor or figure for? What does *the body mean to say* by trembling or crying, presuming one can speak here of the body, or of saying, of meaning, and of rhetoric? (1995: 55)

I recognize that within the interpretative frameworks used by the people of Gauribidanur, the hyphenated nature of their identity came to the fore not just in terms of how death was now interpreted along with the ceremonies and customs that came to surround the experience of death—where the experience of death was not seen in terms of the death of experience—but that this was also expressed in terms of what 'the body meant to say' in the new flexible framework provided by integrating and imagining a way of understanding the body. This body, though undoubtedly remembered to have been scorned and despised by the dominant community, was now held

to be the 'axis of salvation' in the new religious structures which they had made their own.⁶ All this resonates with the findings of an important new book, where the author, after researching Dalit converts in Chhattisgarh in north central India, concludes: 'Those who became Christian drew upon the symbols of both colonizer and colonized, and refashioned them into a coherent, meaningful, and effective collective identity that enabled them to change the world, or at least their experience of it' (Bauman 2008: 244).⁷ In contrast to an individual-oriented way of dealing with death, a sense of the collective permeated the fashioning of identity. Hence the honoring of the dead and the value placed on the observance of certain ways of being, believing, and behaving was undoubtedly part of the reality that the acceptance of Christianity—on their own terms—had led to the creative shaping of a new collective identity, through the reshaping of 'stories [that] flourish on innovative revitalization' (Sugirtharajah 2005: 231).

This revitalization offered the people of Gauribidanur a new way to center and enter the reality of death, a way that calls into question a statement like the following: 'Even if one makes some concessions about the possibility that death may sometimes contribute something to life or heighten the awareness and direction of life, surely it remains on the whole a negative and destructive phenomenon' (Macquarrie 1982: 242). Being part of the process of reading death in this congregation and observing the way they negotiated the reality of death leads me to believe that they did not process death in any negative way, but used the fact of death to positively enrich their lives while seeking to be connected with those who had died, and in this sense, death was not seen as some kind of destructive phenomenon, but part of the process of life. Here we have an interesting resonance with the culture of the ancient Egyptians, where, it has been pointed out that '[t]he Egyptians were not obsessed with death; the study of their funerary beliefs shows that it was the love of life which drove them to make such elaborate preparations for burial, since death accompanied by the correct rituals was only the beginning of eternal life' (Spencer 1982: 73). From another time, another place, in a culture and setting seemingly far removed from the elaborate artifacts, preparations, and ceremonies surrounding death and

6. This is part of the translation of the phrase *caro salutis cardo*, from Tertullian's treatise *De resurrectione mortuorum*, 8.2, translated by Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa as 'the flesh is the axis of salvation' (1990: 34 n. 33).

7. Also see the comments of Saurabh Dube who, among other things, investigates people in the same region as that of Bauman and states that his methodological approach is 'to trace the manner whereby central Indian subjects of empire, evangelization, state law, and caste authority simultaneously thought through colonial categories and vernacular conceptions, tracking the practices through which they translated and recast the stipulations of evangelical Christianity and the terms of colonial law so that they did and undid the hierarchies of village life' (2004: 22).

the way death was memorialized in ancient Egypt, the people of the small Dalit Christian enclave engaged death within the frame of 'the love of life' which led to the care of the self and the body, including the use of food and the reinforcement of family ties, in spite of the manner of death, the age at which death took place, or the way in which the physical tomb was constructed or otherwise. Reading death was indeed revitalizing the dead and thereby also the living.

Returning, Remembering, and Revisioning

I last stood by the grave of Edmund Arthur Snuggs on 26 February 2006, almost a hundred years after his death and burial in the Udamalode cemetery. The empire was long since gone, but its shadows still lingered. The grave was freshly whitewashed, and the metal name-board newly painted. He was in good company. Gradual improvement in economic status meant that many of the graves around his had been 'cemented' and there were a couple of more elaborately built graves. Decaying wooden crosses still lay scattered around, and the graves of many whom I had buried during my time there were gradually sinking back, even though it was known to the villagers precisely who lay where. Families that were climbing the ladder had paid attention to the family graves, which sparkled resplendently white in the noonday sun. There were even some graves that had memorial slabs which had been carved and brought all the way from Bangalore. Many graves continued to be overshadowed by the thick thorny bushes that seemed to proliferate effortlessly even in that dusty and dry area. A long, often lonely, but always evocative history of the encounter of Christianity with the religions of the land lay around me, asking to be read and recorded, investigated and interrogated.

The novelist, Ian McEwan in his book *Saturday*, writes:

How restful it must once have been, in another age, to be prosperous and believe that an all-knowing supernatural force had allotted people to their stations in life. And not see how the belief served your own prosperity—a form of anosognosia, a useful psychiatric term for a lack of awareness of one's own condition. Now we think we do see, how do things stand? After the ruinous experiments of the lately deceased century, after so much wild behaviour, so many deaths, a queasy agnosticism has settled around these matters of justice and redistributed wealth. No more big ideas. The world must improve, if at all, by tiny steps. People mostly take an existential view—having to sweep the streets for a living looks like simple bad luck. It's not a visionary age. The streets need to be clean. Let the unlucky enlist (2005: 74).

It would have been easy for me to consign my people in Udamalode to the category of the unlucky enlisted ones, enlisted in a form of Christianity that they did not know much about, or perhaps care much about. It would have

been easy to look upon them as those who were sunk into anosognosia, whom I would have to represent since I could easily claim that they could not represent themselves. But no, the walk through the cemetery has forced me to confront my own assumptions about people, motives, attitudes, and commitments. Confronting and reading death has compelled me to try to understand what it means to revision and convert death.⁸

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8. A major part of this essay was delivered as the first of the Teape Lectures 2007 (on the theme 'Converting Death: Continuity and Transformation in the Understanding of Death in Indian-Christian Communities') at the University of Cambridge on 15 October 2007. I want to thank the administrators of the Teape Trust, especially Dr John Sweet, Revd Jonathan Collis, and Professor Dr Julius Lipner for their invitation, hospitality, and friendship. I also want to appreciate the presence of those who attended the lectures at Cambridge, at St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi-faith Society, Leicester, and at New College, Edinburgh University, for their creative interaction with the ideas presented during the lectures.

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‘COME OVER AND HELP US’: A POSTCOLONIAL READING
OF BIBLICAL IMAGERY IN THE *WHMS* ORIENTAL HOME
NATIONAL FUNDRAISING TOUR, 1908–1909

Jeffrey L. Staley

2008 marks the centennial of a six-month long, cross-country fundraising tour taken by a group of Chinese American children from the Methodist Episcopal Church’s ‘Oriental Home’ in Berkeley, California. A board of white women under the auspices of the *Woman’s Home Missionary Society* governed the Oriental Home whose original building in San Francisco’s Chinatown was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and fire. In an attempt to raise money to build a new Home for orphaned girls and trafficked women, Carrie Davis, the superintendent of the Home, took a group of eight children to Philadelphia to perform at the annual meeting of the *WHMS*. After spending a week in Philadelphia and being celebrated in the city newspapers, the choir of seven girls and one boy went on to Washington, DC where they sang for President Theodore Roosevelt in the White House. The account of their visit with the President made the front page of the *New York Times* and was carried by numerous newspapers across the United States. The traveling troupe created a stir wherever they went. Audiences—often numbering more than five hundred people—were mesmerized by the children’s costumes, their musical skills, their command of English, and their knowledge of Scripture.

My initial interest in this otherwise forgotten fundraising tour is rooted in the fact that my children’s great-grandmother (my wife’s maternal grandmother), Maud Lai, was the oldest child on the trip. But as I dug deeper into this bit of family history, the interrelationship of such themes as children on display, race/ethnicity, travel, and Scripture—all set against the backdrop of a burgeoning American empire—struck me as a productive place to explore my professional interests in postcolonial theory and biblical interpretation.

In his book *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, R.S. Sugirtharajah argues that ‘It is the multidisciplinary nature of the enterprise which gives postcolonialism its energy. It sees revelation as an ongoing process which embraces not only the Bible, tradition, and the Church, but other sacred texts and contemporary secular events as well’ (2006: 130). Postcolonial criticism thus poses the following questions to the Bible:

'Who has the power to interpret or tell stories? To whom do the stories/texts belong? Who controls their meaning? Who decides what texts we choose? Against whom are these stories or interpretations aimed? What is their ethical effect? Who has power to access data' (Sugirtharajah 2006: 538)? It is not my goal to answer all of Sugirtharajah's questions in this essay, but it seems to me that the issues of 'power', 'belonging', and 'ethics' are particularly appropriate to this forgotten traveling spectacle of early twentieth-century Chinese American childhood. And moving beyond these questions, I am hoping that this story might also function as a '*how* of tradition invention', one which might help to 'legitimize Asian American biblical hermeneutics through an inventive tradition of citation, or of reference without referentiality' (Liew 2008: 7; see also Bow 1995: 34-35, 43).

As far as I can tell, no detailed program of the children's performances ever existed. So the first part of my essay focuses on reconstructing a typical performance.¹ Although historical records of the tour tend to be quite sketchy and are often little more than brief announcements of upcoming church events on the back pages of Saturday newspapers, occasionally an interested reporter will give a summary of the children's singing or of Carrie Davis's fundraising appeal. Not surprisingly, a few longer articles in Methodist magazines list the songs the children sang and their Scripture recitations. Finally, Carrie's Oriental Home daybook gives the most detailed description of the fundraising tour, along with her own account of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire. While each of these sources is problematical in its own way, the four elements of the performances most often cited are: (1) Carrie's account of the 1906 earthquake and fire; (2) the children's exotic clothing; (3) their singing; and (4) their recitation of Scripture.

The hypothetical reconstruction of a typical performance leads logically to an analysis of how Carrie Davis and the singing group used Scripture. From there I move on to propose a postcolonial analysis that explores the issues of agency and voice; the tropes of travel and clothing as they relate to conversion and empire; and the overarching function of the white superintendent's voice. On a positive note, postcolonial analysis of the fundraising tour reveals that Scripture could function to empower marginalized voices on the domestic, 'Home Mission' front at a time when the United States

1. Jane Haggis addresses this sort of reconstructive problem when she writes, '[T]here are issues associated with how to deal with the remnants and records of the past, in their incompleteness and partialities, and... the related issues of writing history in a late twentieth-century context of post-coloniality. How does one try to write a non-recuperative history that confronts the contemporary challenges of acknowledging difference and attempts to construct a 'gumbo ya-ya' of gender and imperialism while trying to avoid the problem... of rewriting history to conform to the present rather than the past?' (2003: 165).

was flexing its developing imperial muscles. But postcolonial analysis of marginalized peoples (here, white women and Chinese children) also shows that 'performed' biblical texts could function in more complex and ambivalent ways than simply as accommodations to or reactions against imperial ideology. And it is this complexity that particularly interests me.

The Fundraising Tour



The children pictured above all accompanied Carrie Davis on the fundraising tour.² Maud (Sow Chun) Lai, my wife's grandmother, is the tallest girl at the back and was thirteen years old. She was rescued at the age of five (December 1900), after having been sold by her parents to a brothel keeper when about two years old (Staley 2007). Bok Lum ('Hardy Washington') Wong was the only boy on the tour (center, with baton). He was nine years old at the time of the fundraising tour. His father placed him in the Oriental Home in July 1904, paying for his room and board. When his father returned to China in August 1908, the Oriental Home was granted guardianship over him. The only other child that is clearly identifiable is the youngest girl, Ida Alice Woo ('Sui Hong', on the extreme left), who was four years old when the choir left Berkeley. Two of the girls in the group are her sisters: Lydia Esther ('Sue Yung'), eight years old; and Mamie Grace ('Suie Kung'), six years old. Their mother had been an 'inmate' of the Home in the 1870s and

2. Postcards such as this were sold for a penny a piece at the children's performances. I purchased this on eBay in April 2006. It is the only color print that I have ever found.

1880s, and died shortly after giving birth to Ida Alice. The girls' father, Jung Sing Woo, subsequently put his three youngest children in the Home in November 1904. Two other girls, Ruby Tsang (eleven years old) and Pearl Tsang (nine years old), were also sisters. Their father had once been the cook of the Oriental Home. Their parents had a difficult marriage and upon separating in June 1903, agreed to put the girls in the Oriental Home. May (Moy Lut) Shem, the one remaining girl was also nine years old, and entered the Oriental Home in October 1904 at her father's request, soon after his wife fled to a Los Angeles brothel with their five children.

The fundraising tour began with a journey north by train to Salem, Oregon. From there Carrie and the children headed east, arriving in Philadelphia on October 21, where they spent the next two weeks. Not everything there was work. The children had time to visit the Wanamaker Department Store, Independence Hall, and the Liberty Bell, where the caretaker 'opened the cage' and let the children touch the bell itself.³

By November 4, 1908 Carrie and the children were in Washington, DC, and at noon on November 5 they sang at the White House. From there they went to sing for Wu T'ing-Fang, the Chinese foreign minister, and his family.⁴ They visited the Congressional Library and the Capitol, 'where every attention was paid [them], and [had their] pictures taken on the steps from which the Presidents make their Inaugural address[es]' (Davis 1913: 68). On Sunday, November 8, they sang at seven different venues, 'being rushed in an auto from place to place' (Davis 1913: 69), and they finished their Washington visit with a performance on November 9, before Secretary of Commerce, Oscar Straus.

For the most part, the traveling troupe seems to have performed at weekend quarterly meetings or annual meetings of various *WHMS* regional Conferences. Thus, most Sundays the children could be found in churches singing for Sunday Schools, missionary meetings, or regular worship services. But occasionally they cast their nets wider. For example, the children sang at Crouse College, Syracuse University for the four hundred delegates of the Convention of the Student Volunteer Union of New York; two weeks before Christmas they sang in Buffalo, New York at five different tree lighting ceremonies; and at the end of January they were on the vaudeville stage at the Mid-Winter Exposition in Topeka, Kansas. In an interview for a South Bend, Indiana newspaper, Carrie said they had appeared at 'schools, high schools, colleges, kindergartens, clubs, homes, churches, and hospitals'.⁵

3. 'Little Lum Big Leader', *Los Angeles Daily Times* (17 March 1909): 9.

4. Wu T'ing-Fang (1842–June 23, 1922) was a highly respected dignitary, and in 1908–09 was serving a second time as the Chinese minister (ambassador) to the United States.

5. 'The Wanderings of Miss Davis and the Chinese Children', *California Christian Advocate* 59 (28 January, 1909): 9.

By early March, Carrie and the children finally made it west of the Great Divide, and on March 16 they arrived in Los Angeles, having performed in forty-two different towns and cities across the United States.⁶ Their long winter of fundraising was at an end, and they could visit churches at a more leisurely pace in warmth and sunshine. But two days later in Redlands, one of the girls came down with the measles, and Carrie Davis herself 'broke down'.⁷ Carrie was taken to the Loma Linda Sanitarium and all subsequent performances were cancelled. There is no record of how or when the children returned to Berkeley.

In her 1913 handwritten 'Record of Work in the Oriental Home', Carrie summarized the six month trip with gushing hyperbole:

We cannot begin to tell of all the splendid achievements of this trip... making known... the story of our labor of love among and for these [Chinese] people under the Woman's Home Missionary Society on the Pacific Coast.

It was a strenuous trip, yet [it] made plain to us that God was with us: Never a stop or hindrance or accident to ourselves or the train we were on. Never late [n]or one of our engagements broken because of weather or sickness. Called to go places we never expected, raising thousands of dollars for our new Home and the work. Converting many to missions, putting a love for the Home work as well as the foreign work into the hearts of others (Davis 1913: 70).

On Stage: Performance in Costume, Scripture, Story, and Song

As noted earlier, there are no extant programs of Carrie and the children's performances. However, numerous partial reports exist—enough to reconstruct a hypothetical version of a typical evening's work.⁸ The following four-part structure is thus my conjecture based upon those records.

6. 'Little Lum Big Leader'.

7. 'Methodist News from Southern California', *California Christian Advocate* 59 (1 April 1909): 13; see also 'Detained by Illness', *Pomona Daily Progress* (22 March 1909): 8. Carrie also wrote, 'The trip ended by me leaving to go to the sanitarium in Loma Linda for a month, then staying at Long Beach, Santa Barbara, and Paso Robles trying to gain health before returning Home. I finally reached home, returning May 1909' (Davis 1913: 65).

8. At Methodist Annual Conferences and WHMS meetings where Carrie and the children were only one of many program entries, their presentations were usually split up. For example, in Salem, Oregon, the children sang in their Chinese costumes, and then after a number of unrelated reports and songs, the children sang again (including the 'national anthem') and recited Scripture. Only then did Carrie Davis give her address (*Official Journal of the Fifty-Sixth Session of the Oregon Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* [September 23-28, 1908]: 43).

On the first day of the eight day WHMS Board of Managers conference in Philadelphia, Lum Wong, with all the children dressed in their Chinese costumes, led the

The performances probably began with the children dressed in Chinese costumes, singing in Chinese and English.⁹ This would be followed by their recitation of Psalm 91. Next, Carrie would give her account of the 1906 earthquake and fire—sometimes accompanied with rescued-from-slavery stories; then the children would come out again—this time all dressed in white 'American clothes' to sing another song in English—and if time permitted, to be quizzed on Bible subjects. As a closing, Lum would lead the children and the audience in singing the 'National Anthem' ('My Country 'Tis of Thee') with Maud playing the organ or piano, if possible.¹⁰

The two things most often mentioned in newspaper accounts of the fundraising tour are the children's songs and their exotic costumes (see also Lee 1999: 28-43; and Kang 2002: 115-17). But audiences would have felt the visual effect of the children's costumes before they heard them sing. Although cute and colorful, to most people the children's clothing would have been viewed as emblematic of the idolatrous festivals and the superstitious, bizarre celebrations associated with Chinese temples.¹¹ Generally, the children's clothing would have fixed them as the heathen 'other,' as a dangerous, viral potentiality living within the borders of the United States. Yet the costumes also implied a different possibility: If the children could be converted and sent back to their parents' native land as Christian adults, they might become positive exporters of the gospel and American

delegates in singing 'America', while Maud played the organ (Maud is incorrectly identified as 'Alice Woo'; 'Chinese Children at Church Rally', *The Philadelphia Press* [22 October, 1908]: 2). The next day the children sang 'God is Love' and 'A Prayer for China', again dressed in their Chinese costumes ('The Twenty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Woman's Home Missionary Society', *Woman's Home Mission* 25 [December 1908]: 226); and in the evening they sang 'Wonderful Love' all dressed in white (*Twenty-Seventh Annual Report Woman's Home Missionary Society MEC for the Year 1907-1908*, 44-45). Three days later, on Sunday they sang 'Come Over and Help Us' and recited Psalm 91 before Carrie's report. Finally on Tuesday, Lum again led the girls and the convention in singing 'My Country 'Tis of Thee' ('The Twenty-Seventh Annual Meeting', 228).

9. The day the children arrived in Philadelphia, the papers had lengthy articles about a 'tribe of nineteen Bontoc Igorrotes' (including four women and three children) from the Philippine Islands, who, with war dances and women dressed in sheath skirts 'decidedly bare underneath', performed for the Seaman's Mission. The next day it was the exotic clothing of the children from the WHMS Oriental Home that captured page two news. A *Washington Times* reporter later described them as dressed 'in fancy costumes [that] made a striking picture, and reminded one of a performance of the "Geisha Girl"' ('Straus Entertained by Chinese Children' [15 November 1908]: 33).

10. This is the only song regularly described as the concluding item in the performances.

11. See for example, Mary Davison, 'The Babies of Chinatown', *Cosmopolitan* (April 1900): 605-612.

democracy. Not insignificantly, American citizens would also then be rid of one particularly problematic immigrant community.

But within the history of Methodist missionary activity in Chinatown and for churches familiar with that work, the children's clothing also evoked the story of the Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5.1-20). The story of Jin Ho, the first female Methodist convert from Chinatown brothel life, was recounted in Reverend Otis Gibson's 1877 book *The Chinese in America*, and was repeated in the twentieth anniversary publications of the *WHMS* (Gibson 1902). Jin Ho's story had functioned as the *raison d'être* for Methodist women's work in San Francisco for over thirty years.

In Revd Gibson's rendering, Jin Ho was the equivalent of Mark's Gentile male demoniac. She was transformed from 'leaving all her tinsel jewelry and gay trappings behind her [...] deliberately throw[ing] herself into the cold waters of the bay', to eventually being 'married [to] a Mr Jee Foke, a good substantial Chinaman, a member of the Congregational Church'. She was thus finally 'clothed and in her right mind' (Gibson 1877: 204-205; see also Pond 1884). When a 'memory stone' was eventually laid in the vestibule of the new Oriental Home on June 19, 1911, a photograph of Jin Ho was placed in a time capsule behind the stone as a reminder of the foundational vision of the Methodist women's Chinatown work.¹²

Of course, the more obvious evocation of Scripture came through the children's recitations and singing. They probably began their performances with a song sung in Chinese called 'A Prayer for China', which to American ears would have sounded like a Chinese version of 'My Country 'Tis of Thee'. However, it was in fact a missionary song sung to the tune of 'God Save the Queen'.¹³ Typically, when the children sang in Chinese they placed

12. Behind the stone is a copper box with a variety of historical documents inside (Mrs J.E. Piatt, 'Work for Orientals on the Pacific Coast', *Woman's Home Missions* 28 [August 1911]: 7-8; 'Corner Stone Laid', *California Christian Advocate* 61 [22 June 1911]: 31; and Mrs J.E. Piatt, 'New Home Built at 940 Washington Street', *California Christian Advocate* 69 [October 21, 1920]: 19). On July 25, 2008, I wandered through the Chinese Christian Cemetery in Colma, CA, and serendipitously discovered Jin Ho's gravestone, nearly face down in the dirt.

13. The standard melody of 'My Country 'Tis of Thee' is 'God Save the Queen'. I have not found the words to 'A Prayer for China', but there are numerous references to the children singing 'the National Anthem in Chinese' ('Chinese Children Heard', *The Washington Evening Star* [9 November 1908]: 18). In fact, the report of the *Twenty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Board of Managers* in Philadelphia states that on Wednesday, October 21 'the great audience arose and sang with the children our own "America", after, to the same air the children had sung their hopes and prayer for China' (*Twenty-Seventh Annual Report Woman's Home Missionary Society Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1907-1908 and Handbook for 1909*, 37; see also 'The Twenty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the Woman's Home Missionary Society', *Woman's Home Missions* 25 [December 1908]: 226).

a Chinese flag on stage beside them. Later when they sang in English, they would carry out an American flag.¹⁴ The juxtaposition of American-born Chinese children dressed in 'heathen' Chinese clothing, standing next to a Chinese flag, singing a song in Chinese that sounded like the American national anthem, surely would have struck white audiences as incongruous and unsettling.

In a more contemporary postcolonial context, but one that resonates with the multi-layered semiotics of the children's performance of 'A Prayer for China', Marvin Carlson writes: 'performance work based primarily upon autobiographical material frequently dedicated to providing a voice to previously silenced individuals or groups... [can become] a major part of socially and politically engaged performance[s]' (2006: 309) and later on, 'some of the most complex and challenging [*sic*]... ethnic performances have utilized mimic or countermimic strategies to deal directly with the process of cultural stagings or representations of ethnicity'.¹⁵ While one would be hard pressed to argue that the Chinese children's singing of 'A Prayer for China' consciously utilized a countermimic strategy, I will argue below that the choice of song and melody could raise a variety of counter-mimic issues for their listening audiences.¹⁶

The other Christian song most often mentioned as preceding Carrie's appeal for funds was called 'Come Over and Help Us'. There are a number of early twentieth century songs by this title, so it is not entirely clear which one the children knew and sang. However, a version found in *The Seed Sower, a Collection of Songs for Sunday Schools and Gospel Meetings: Words and Music* (see below) seems to fit best the fundraising context.¹⁷ Its words are simpler than those of other versions and would be easier for the young children to learn. Records also indicate that the children sang an otherwise unidentified 'motion song', and one can easily imagine beckoning hand motions accompanying the refrain of this version.¹⁸

14. 'Little Chinese Musicians', *New York Tribune* (21 February 1909): 5.

15. Carlson goes on to note how many contemporary ethnic performances have drawn 'upon the once popular European and North American practice of exhibiting indigenous people from Africa, Asia, and the Americas in fairs, shows, and circuses' (2006: 311). The exhibitions that Carlson describes as 'once popular' were the typical North American fare in 1908.

16. Bhabha describes 'the *menace* of mimicry' as 'its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority' (1994: 126). Bart Moore-Gilbert raises the problem of consciousness and intentionality in Bhabha's concept of mimicry, an issue which is particularly problematic in my reconstruction of the children's performances (1997: 132-39).

17. A.F. Myers (Toledo, OH: The W.W. Whitney Co., 1897).

18. *Official Journal of the Fifty-Sixth Session of the Oregon Annual Conference*, 43.

Come Over and Help Us

A voice comes o'er the waters,
 A voice both loud and clear,
 'Come over here and help us,
 We're bound in slavish fear!
 Our chains do now confine us
 In darkness and in doubt,
 No light to shine upon us,
 No hand to bring us out'.
 Come over and help us!
 Come over and help us!
 Come over and help us!
 Come over and help us today.
 Our idols cannot help us;
 We only deeper fall;
 And dimmer grows our vision,
 When on their names we call,
 We look and wait and wonder
 If someone o'er the sea
 Will hasten to relieve us,
 Will come and set us free.

Refrain

We hear that o'er the waters
 A glorious light doth shine,
 A light sent down from heaven,
 Oh, send that light divine!
 We hear that one called Jesus
 Can save us from our sin;
 We want to hear his footsteps,
 We want to let Him in.

Refrain

The song is based upon the 'Macedonian Cry' of Acts 16.6-13, a central trope of nineteenth-century missionary movements (Staley 2004). But by singing the song, the children were also inadvertently evoking an image from the Protestant origins of the United States. On the official seal of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (1629-92; see Bross 2003), a New England Pequot parrots Paul's vision from 1,600 years earlier, begging for help from English colonists.¹⁹ The words of the children's song thus also evoke an incipient myth of Manifest Destiny and of England's imperial 'mission' to the world. But now it is recontextualized, embodied in Chinese American children who act as mimics of a more complex mission ideology.

It is highly unlikely that the Canadian immigrant, Carrie Davis, knew that the 'Macedonian cry' image had appeared on the original seal of the

19. The Massachusetts Bay Colony seal shows an Indian with bow and arrow in hand, and a banner coming out of his mouth with the words 'Come over and help us'.

Massachusetts Bay Colony. But no doubt many of the Eastern seaboard audiences would have heard echoes of their own Yankee heritage in the children's song. However, the children's appeal to 'Come over and help us' was not a call to cross the Aegean Sea to Philippi or to sail the Pacific Ocean to Canton. Rather, the 'come over' on their lips was no less than Carrie's challenge to her audiences to re-vision the Chinese presence in the United States. With the children's voices raised in song, San Francisco's Chinatown—'over' on the West coast of the United States—becomes a place where children are presently 'bound in slavish fear', where 'chains do now confine' them and their 'idols cannot help' them.

After singing 'Come Over and Help Us', the children usually 'recited... the ninety-first Psalm and answered many Bible questions which might have puzzled their elders'.²⁰ Between 1905 and 1908, the April issues of *Woman's Home Mission* magazine regularly featured the work of the Oriental Bureau. But only once during those years did the editors choose to put on the cover a photograph of the Oriental Home. Ironically, that was April 1906. By the time many of the magazine's subscribers were reading the annual update of the Oriental Home, only an empty shell remained. Another portentous and ironic vignette is found on the second page of the same issue. There Carrie relates the tragic story of Esther Woo, 'one of our brightest girls', who had been playing on the roof of the Oriental Home a few days before Christmas.²¹ She lost her balance, fell off, and was instantly killed. 'Rescued from domestic slavery a few years earlier', Carrie wrote, 'the ninety-first Psalm [was]... her favorite, and at morning and evening devotions she was often heard to quote from it'.²²

The King James Version of Psalm 91.1-7 reads as follows:

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, [He is] my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, [and] from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth [shall be thy] shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; [nor] for the arrow [that] flieth by day; [nor] for the pestilence [that] walketh in darkness; [nor] for the destruction [that] wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; [but] it shall not come nigh thee.

The Psalm's images of a sheltering and protecting God made it a natural text to teach girls who had been rescued from debt slavery or had escaped from

20. 'Twenty-Seventh Annual Meeting', 226.

21. Carrie Davis, 'Present Day Items Concerning the Oriental Home', *Woman's Home Missions* 23 (April 1906): 304.

22. 'Present Day Items', 304.

the brothels and alleys of San Francisco's Chinatown; and for decades it had been taught to new 'inmates' of the Oriental Home. So it is not surprising to find parts of this Psalm and Psalm 34 quoted in Carrie's cross-country fundraising appeal. In fact, these two Old Testament texts functioned as the major filter for Carrie's narrative of their miraculous escape from the earthquake and fire. The two Psalms' themes of 'refuge' and 'shelter' recur throughout her own handwritten account below. The combination of Carrie's dramatic story and the Chinese children's Bible recitations in exotic Oriental clothing thus functioned as a dramatic crescendo confirming God's overarching providential care through the worst of times. But that is not all. A reporter from Indiana's *South Bend Tribune* seems to have picked up on another biblical image in his summary of Carrie's message:

Miss Davis told of the work of the San Francisco rescue mission and vividly described the earthquake in 1906, in which the mission property was destroyed. When the earthquake came, Miss Davis described how she gathered up two little Chinese babies, one in each arm, and rushed downstairs and unlocked the door, letting the other children out into the street, which was heaving up and down. The children made no outcry and Miss Davis did not know what she had done until she was told later. Everyone seemed dazed, she said. She told of her flight with 40 Chinese children from the city of flame in a wagon, the driver charging \$50 to take them to a place of safety. She mentioned the terrible scenes witnessed in the stricken city and of the flight into Oakland.²³

The reporter then goes on to recount a dramatic rescue story that Carrie had also told. But what is surprising about this reporter's summary of the earthquake and fire is that there is no mention of God's providential care, nor any allusion to Scripture. Instead, the natural descriptions of the ground heaving up and down (minus any mention of broken glass or cracking wooden beams),²⁴ if indeed these reflect Carrie's own words, are more suggestive of childbirth than any divine miracle. And regardless of whether Carrie was aware of these word choices, they subversively work to legitimate her claim of being the true mother (matron and legal guardian) of the eight Chinese children. Like Gal. 4.27 which reads 'Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath a husband' (KJV, quoting Isa. 54.1), Carrie was an unmarried, 'barren' woman²⁵ that 'bearest not'—except metaphorically through the earthquake.

23. 'Tells of Mission Work', *South Bend Tribune* (4 January 1909) 12.

24. These aspects were mentioned in her June 1906 account (Carrie Davis, 'Tidings from the Oriental Home', *Woman's Home Mission* 23 [June 1906]: 351).

25. Jennifer Snow describes female missionaries of the nineteenth century generally as 'single, well-traveled, and accustomed to public speaking and activity' (2007: 7). These identifiers fit Carrie Davis well.

The summary account does not dwell on the feminine images or on any specific biblical text. Nor do Carrie's other accounts of the earthquake and fire overdetermine the feminine images found here. So I would not want to argue that the childbirth metaphor was central to Carrie's theological understanding of the earthquake. In Carrie's other accounts the pilgrimage image dominates more than that of childbirth. And this makes sense dramatically and theologically, since the children were active participants in the long trek from San Francisco to Oakland.

Not surprisingly, one of the lengthiest entries in Carrie Davis's unpublished 'Record of Work in the Oriental Home' is dated April 18, 1906, the day of the great earthquake. But while it shares many common features with the account above and with the May 7 record Carrie wrote for the June 1906 issue of the *Woman's Home Mission* magazine,²⁶ it diverges from these two versions in significant ways. Carrie's May 7, 1906 account was clearly written under the stress of having lived for three weeks under post-earthquake crisis conditions. And although Carrie used the word 'thankful' a number of times in that account, she only once mentioned 'the protecting care of our heavenly Father'. There is no other explicit mention of God or Scripture in the one and a half column article.

Most likely the more tightly written, theologically explicit account of the earthquake and fire found in Carrie's 'Record of Work' reflects her later editorial hand and is probably the version of the earthquake and fire that she gave at fundraising events across the United States in 1908–1909 and 1910–11. There are numerous reasons for thinking this—none more significant than the simple facts that the second sentence reads 'Our Home was then at 912 Washington Street', and that in the middle of the account Carrie pauses to mention where the Oriental Home moved in September 1908 and December 1911—with no change in penmanship or added words in the margins. What follows below is thus Carrie's account in its entirety as written in her 'Record of Work in the Oriental Home 1903–1913'.

The great earthquake and fire took place in San Francisco about 5 AM. Our Home was then at 912 Washington Street. A day never to be forgotten.

Amidst the crashing of chimneys and cracking and tearing of walls and everything movable falling around us, we all escaped from the building without a scratch. As we reached the street and realized what we had escaped from, the ninety-first Psalm came to our remembrance. 'He shall cover thee with his feathers; and under his wings shalt thou take refuge'. Rc.²⁷

Without food but for a few crackers and oranges, we watched the fire devouring block after block until 8 PM when it was within two blocks of us, and we were warned to leave the building. We had not been in the Home all

26. Davis, 'Tidings from the Oriental Home'.

27. Ps. 91.4. It is not clear what 'Rc' stand for.

day, as it was too much shattered, and too dangerous, but had taken refuge in the Mission building, where the church was.

For the first time that day, a team was seen in the vicinity and this was secured at the expense of \$50.00 to take the forty-eight women and children to some part of the city beyond the fire. At 10 PM we found ourselves at the corner of California and Broderick Streets, in the vicinity of Mrs L.P. Williams' home, the former Bureau Secretary of the work for ten years. We went to her home and all were sheltered for the night.

By daylight we heard that all the Mission houses were gone and all that part of the city. At 7 AM we started on our march to the ferry to try and get across the Bay if possible. In this we were led by the Lord. While thousands were fleeing to the Presidio and Park, the thought of going there had not come to us. Each one with a bundle, and with several babies in the party, and the superintendent carrying the records—all that could be saved of the past—it was a weary party that reached Beach Point at noon. Here we found most of the Chinese gathered. A strange Chinaman, knowing that we were from the Mission, distributed a box of crackers among the children. These, with a drink of water, prepared us for the remainder of the journey which now lay through the burning and burnt part of the city.

The heat from the fire and sun was intense and many times different ones fell by the wayside.²⁸ At 4 PM we reached the ferry, and it was with thankful hearts we sank on a seat on the boat. As we reached Golden Gate²⁹ Oakland, we left the family in care of Rev. Chan Hon Fan and went to Berkeley to see Mrs F.D. Bovard, the Bureau Secretary, to tell her of our escape and seek homes for the children. By the next evening all were sheltered in various homes in Oakland and Berkeley.

After a week's search for a house, the Home was again started at 2116 Spaulding Avenue, Berkeley where we lived until September 1, 1908 when we moved to 1918 University Avenue, Berkeley. From here the last of December to Beulah Heights.

A braver band of children could not be found than they were that day, as they marched through the burning city. Not a child cried, nor fretted, or complained. Yet there were little four year-olds who walked all these weary miles, and the perspiration ran down their little red faces, burned with the excessive heat.

'The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him'.³⁰ And I felt he was surely with us that day, and all through the strenuous days that followed.

28. An allusion to the 'Parable of the Sower', Mk 4.4 (KJV).

29. The reference to the 'Golden Gate' evokes images of the heavenly Jerusalem in popular Christian thought (cf. Rev. 21.5–22.7).

30. Ps. 34.7.

We have much to thank kind friends for, who rallied to our assistance. Wherever the WHMS was, we were remembered and thought of in prayers, letters, and more material gifts. All this made us thank God and take courage to go forward (Davis 1913: 45-47).

Although Carrie took center stage in retelling this story during the 1908–1909 fundraising trip, she effectively masks her own role in the narrative by slipping gently into the corporate 'we' of the children whose salvation dominates the account. In fact, all eight children whom Carrie Davis took on the fundraising tour had been in the Oriental Home at 912 Washington Street during the earthquake and had made the long trek to the Ferry Building through the searing heat of the engulfing fire. Little Ida was probably one of the 'several babies' that Carrie mentions.

By comparing Carrie's earliest record of the earthquake and fire with other accounts, Carrie's theological strategy in the fundraising appeal becomes clearer. Her restructured telling reads like John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, planted squarely on American soil. Isabel Hofmeyr notes that by the late nineteenth century, *Pilgrim's Progress* had become the most translated Christian book after the Bible, with five different translations in Chinese.³¹ There were already two illustrated Chinese translations in two different dialects when George Offor published his edition of Bunyan's works in 1862 (2004: 35), so it would not be surprising for Carrie to read her own experiences and those of the Chinese children through the lens of *Pilgrim's* story.

So Carrie and the children flee the 'City of Destruction', carrying their burdens, and end up at Mrs L.P. William's house—their 'House Beautiful'. The next day they cross their 'River of Death' and land finally at the gates of a 'Celestial City' where their own 'Shining One', a Chinese Christian (Revd Ho Fan Chan) waits to welcome them. Like Part Two of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which centers on Christian's wife, Christiana, and her four children,³² the focus of Carrie's story of the earthquake and fire elides all male figures except for Revd Chan, the pastor of the Chinese Methodist church, and an anonymous Chinese man who offers the women and children crackers and water.³³ And like the supper that Gaius prepares for Chris-

31. William C. Burns had translated *Pilgrim's Progress* into Chinese before 1860, and added Chinese-style woodcut illustrations (Austin 2007: 71). Its 'timeless dreamland' was especially appealing to Chinese folk religion (Austin 2007: 70, 72).

32. Hofmeyr is able to show how 'Greatheart', who accompanies Christiana on her journey to the 'Celestial City', becomes a model for late Victorian (celibate) women missionaries (2004: 161-65); a model that would have well fit Carrie Davis's self-image.

33. The 'leading of the Lord' takes the place of the men whom Mrs F.D. Bovard mentioned as helping Carrie and the children ('The Great Disaster', *Woman's Home Missions* 23 [June 1906]: 342). Thus in Carrie's rendering a team (and wagon) mysteriously appears near the Mission building, and Carrie and the children later simply

tiana near the end of her pilgrim journey, the crackers and water mentioned by Carrie symbolize the tokens of the Methodist Love Feast which fortify Carrie and the children as they begin their trek through the heart of the city's smoldering ruins.

The onstage children thus functioned as dramatic, living embodiments of Scripture and as moving allegories of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. They were visual testimonials to the 'overshadowing' protective care of God as exemplified in Psalm 91 which they would have just finished reciting. Moreover, by carefully erasing all references to white males, Carrie's own account becomes a subversive challenge to colonialist and male hegemony. It is a strange (heathen?) Chinese man who offers the women and children the Christian Eucharistic tokens just before the hardest part of their journey; and it is a Chinese Methodist pastor who welcomes them at the 'Golden Gate' Oakland and cares for 'the family'.

Working in tandem, Carrie's report and the children's performances must have been visually and aurally impressive to Midwest and Eastern seaboard audiences. But would anyone have picked up on the dramatic absence of white males in what they heard and saw? Little Lum, the silent baton twirling marionette waiting backstage, would have to come out and play the role of Carrie's missing men, reminding audiences of what they had not heard nor quite been able to put into words.

The children would typically be dressed in white when they returned to the stage for their final appearance,³⁴ and they would close out the program 'with two verses of "America" ["My Country 'Tis of Thee"], led by little "Professor Lum Wong" with his wonderful baton'.³⁵

My country 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing!
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrim's pride,
From every mountainside
Let freedom ring!
My native country, thee,
Land of the noble free,
Thy name I love.

'find themselves' in the vicinity of Mrs L.P. Williams's home. But it was, in fact, Mrs. Bovard's husband who found the team and wagon for them ('The Great Disaster', 342).

34. There are no photographs from the tour of the children dressed in white, although this feature of the program is mentioned from time to time (e.g. *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report*, 44-45). There are, however, photographs of the Oriental Home children dressed in white that date from 1904 and 1907.

35. 'Chinese Little Folk Call on the President', *Washington Times* (5 November 1908): 8.

I love thy rocks and rills,
 Thy woods and templed hills,
 My heart with rapture thrills
 Like that above!

It is not clear whether the children sang the first and second verses of the anthem, but both stanzas could certainly function as a provocative challenge when sung by Chinese children whose 'native country' was the United States, and some of whose parents had died in this land of 'freedom' without ever having experienced the rights of normal citizens.³⁶ Furthermore, if my interpretation of Carrie's version of the San Francisco earthquake and fire is correct, then the Chinese children had now also become Bunyan's Christian pilgrims in the 'Land of the pilgrim's pride', birthed by Carrie, a virginal Caucasian mother.³⁷

President Theodore Roosevelt was already in the process of planning a Conference on the Care of Dependent Children by the time the children sang 'The National Anthem' for him at the White House and for Oscar Straus, the Secretary of Commerce and Labor a few days later (Crenson 1998: 10-11). And although Roosevelt's January 1909 Conference did not deal in any way with dependent Asian children living in the United States, one cannot help but think that perhaps part of his interest in meeting the Oriental Home children was due to the fact that he was thinking about organizing the conference. But if Carrie hoped to persuade the President to include a discussion of Asian American children in his plans, the singing of the Chinese children did nothing to convince him that they were worth anything beyond a few moments' entertainment.

Toward a Postcolonial Analysis

Of course the 1908 fundraising trip was not the Chinese children's idea.³⁸ They did not choose the songs or the biblical texts, nor is there any evidence

36. For example, Qui Fah, the mother of the three Woo girls, died in Virginia City, Nevada in 1904, shortly after the birth of her daughter, Ida Alice (Davis 1913: 25). Bhabha writes tantalizingly briefly of how 'the spirit of the Western nation has been symbolized in epic and anthem, voiced by a "unanimous people assembled in the self-presence of its speech"' (1994: 132, quoting Derrida 1976: 134).

37. Bhabha writes how 'counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disturb those ideological maneuvers through which "imagined communities" are given essentialist identities' (1994: 213, see also 215).

38. In August 2008 I had a telephone conversation with eighty-eight year-old Haw Chan Jung who lived in the Oriental Home from 1923 to 1927. In 1924, when she was about five years old, Elsie Kirk, Superintendent of the Home, was planning to speak at the WHMS annual meeting in Chicago. She was nervous about speaking at the

that they ever told their own versions of the earthquake and fire. Every part of their presentation was scripted by someone else—probably by Carrie Davis herself. So to return to a slightly modified rendering of R.S. Sugirtharajah's questions: 'Whose power is reflected in the telling of this story? To whom does the story/text belong? Who controls its meaning? Against whom is the story or interpretation aimed? What is its ethical effect? Who has power to access data' (2006: 538)? The first and last questions are easiest to answer. Carrie Davis, the fifty-two-year-old, white Oriental Home superintendent controlled the telling of the story and the access to its data. The Chinese children were Carrie's life blood and her voice. She was the ventriloquist; the puppet-master. Without the children she would not have been on the road six months; without them she would not have gotten the newspaper coverage or the photographs. Without the eight talented, vivacious, photogenic Chinese American children she would not have been able to raise the funds to rebuild the Oriental Home.

But the answers to R.S. Sugirtharajah's other four questions are more complex. Are the Chinese children merely puppets that Carrie Davis twisted on fundraisers' purse strings? Or might the children exhibit elements of Homi Bhabhan hybridity and mimicry? Is it possible once the children are on stage that the story begins to belong to them; that in an important way they begin to control its meaning and redirect its interpretation?

Certainly on a most basic level, audiences were dramatically confronted with the physical presence of the children—their clothing and their voices. And their singing of the song 'A Prayer for China' is perhaps the best example of a counter-hegemonic mimicry that challenges Carrie Davis's power to control the biblical story. For an audience that is not told what they are hearing, the 'Prayer for China' song *is* the National Anthem sung in Chinese—sung by children who, in the very next breath, speak perfect English and act like precocious American kids.³⁹

The children are therefore not *pretending* to be 'Americans' when they sing the 'National Anthem' in Chinese. They are unequivocally Chinese in dress, in language, and in flag. Rather, they are *pretending* to be unassimilated Chinese immigrants or Chinese nationals. But for an initiated audience which knows that the children are not singing the National Anthem

meeting, so she went to Donaldina Cameron in the Presbyterian Occidental Home to ask her what she should do. According to Haw, who lived with Elsie Kirk later in life, Miss Cameron told Miss Kirk to take a cute little Chinese girl to the meeting—one who was potty-trained and easy-going—dress her in Chinese clothing, and put her on stage. The presence of a little girl in Chinese clothing would do more to bring in donations than anything Elsie could ever say. Haw was the girl Elsie Kirk chose to take with her in 1924.

39. The children's English language skills were a frequent topic of newspaper reports (e.g. 'Straus Entertained by Chinese Children').

but a missionary (imperializing) hymn that encourages Christians to pray for the salvation of China's millions, they must disregard what they *seem to see* (heathen Chinese children) *and hear* (the National Anthem) and trust that Carrie and the children are telling them the truth—that this Home Missionary along with the eight Chinese children born in the United States are fervently *praying* for white Americans to 'come rescue' them from themselves.

My point is that there are two levels of dissonance here: (1) Chinese children in traditional Chinese clothing sing in Chinese (all the children were born in the United States and know English, so they are 'mimicking' being *from* China); and (2) They sing a song that mimics the American National Anthem (the song is actually a missionary 'prayer for China'—so the children are mimicking Chinese natives who are ventriloquists for a Western, imperializing mission ideology).

But it is also possible to read the children's inherent mimicry with an even greater degree of complexity by adding a third level of dissonance. By going on to beckon their audiences to 'come over and help' them, American citizens were being invited to help rebuild a Home within the United States itself for the Chinese children to stay. Audiences were not being asked to give money to a safe, distant place beyond the sea. Any monies raised to rebuild the Oriental Home would ensure that more and more Chinese children would be living in the United States.

So a third level of dissonance should be added: The children are praying for help to rebuild their home in the United States (their prayer is for the *Home* Missionary Society members to assist them, so the mimicry takes a sharp problematic turn. If audiences give them money, they may be ensuring that Chinese remain in the United States).

The 'Macedonian Cry' of Acts 16 represents a *vision* that Paul had; a Paul who, if the author of Acts is to be trusted, had not yet been in the territory represented by the 'Macedonian'. Whatever else the Macedonian was, he was minimally Paul's internalization of the foreigner's desire and need. But despite Carrie's choreographed fundraising appeal, the Chinese American Oriental Home children were not simply figments of Carrie's religious imagination. Nor did the children function like the Syro-Phoenician woman of Mk 7.24-30, who approached Jesus, the foreigner, in her own territory and with her own clear sense of agency and need. Rather, the Chinese American children seem closer to the native Gibeonites of Josh. 9.3-27 who by their ragged clothing and moldy food devised a ruse to stave off a divinely sanctioned annihilation. The Macedonian cry of Acts 16 is 'imaginary'; a piece of pure ventriloquism—a hologram (see Bross 2003: 395-96, 398). The Syro-Phoenician woman is the exact opposite. She is real, without pretence or guile. She was able to speak out of her own sense of urgency and agency. But the children are not visions, nor holograms; nor do they exist

independently of their puppet-master. Like the Gibeonites in the book of Joshua, the children must 'mimic' the foreigner, the pilgrim, in order to preserve a home in their own 'native country'. In so doing they call into question the American imperial meanings of 'native country', 'pilgrim', and the biblical texts that were being used to support those meanings.



The issues of clothing, story, and trust are dramatically evoked in this 'Christianized' *New York World* cartoon which appeared June 29, 1909 on the editorial page of the *Oakland [California] Tribune* shortly after the Oriental Home children returned to Berkeley.⁴⁰ Like the Gerasene demoniac, clothed and in his right mind, and like Lum, the baton-wielding choir leader

40. Page 6. The cartoon was a response to the June 17 murder of nineteen-year-old Elsie Sigel, whose strangled corpse was discovered inside a trunk in the Manhattan apartment of Leon Ling, her former Sunday school student and lover. The murder sent shock waves throughout the nation (see Lui [2005: 114-15, 129-42, 181]; see also Liew's quotation of Wallace Irwin's 1906 'Chinatown Ballad' entitled 'Young Mr. Yan' [2008: 19-20]).

who was called a 'tiny turncoat' in *The New York Times* article,⁴¹ this 'Christianized?' Chinaman is not to be trusted. He will say one thing to the doe-eyed, naive missionary girl—even permitting her to cut off his queue—but underneath all the hair he is still a leering, 'tawny-skinned' Oriental. He is arguably an adult version of *The New York Times*'s Lum—who went from talking out of both sides of his mouth in the White House, to being baptized a few hours later at Hamline Methodist Church—declaring that he intended to be a Methodist minister.⁴²

The cartoon figure is perhaps simply a sinister 'Christianized' version of the Oriental Home children, who sang something in Chinese that *sounded* like the National Anthem—but really wasn't. The cartoon challenges its own naive readers in the same way *The New York Times* did its readers: Where will the cartoon Chinaman/Lum be in ten months? Ten years? In twenty? The cute missionary girl—a younger version of Carrie Davis—will have cut off a few more queues by then, changed the clothing of a few more orphaned Chinese children, and sent them off to 'American schools'—but readers shouldn't think the Chinese people can really change. Underneath it all they are still duplicitous and unscrupulous. And while Carrie or the cute missionary girl is busy in the mission barbershop, more and more Chinese are slipping into the country, hiding out in American Chinatowns, destroying the economy and threatening innocent white women.

It seems to me that there is a nascent Asian American interpretation of the Bible lurking beneath the forgotten *WHMS* fundraising tour of 1908–1909, an interpretation that is hinted at in the racist cartoon pictured above (see also Liew 2008: 18–20, 60). The Chinese children are not simply puppets that the ventriloquist Carrie Davis can manipulate for her own Progressive agenda. They are, in fact, Bhabha-like hybrids whose costumes, pageantry, and voices work together to challenge the dominant, American imperial reading of the biblical foreigner, sojourner, and native. As such, they can

41. Although there are a number of different versions of the children's visit with the President, what follows is the *New York Times* article in its entirety: 'Eight Chinese children, ranging in age from 4 to 13 years, all inmates of the Oriental Rescue Home of the Methodist Church, in San Francisco, called at the White House today. The President received the tawny little foundlings with great cordiality and sent them away with each hugging a photograph of the White House marked with the President's autograph.'

'The Chinese were on their way home from a missionary conference at Philadelphia, and were in charge of Miss Carrie Davis, their matron. The only boy in the crowd was little Lum Wong. He told the President that he had been in Lincoln, Neb. And that while in that town he had been a Bryan man, but now he was for Taft. The President congratulated him on his change of heart, laughing heartily at the frankness of the tiny turncoat' ('Tiny Chinese See President' [Friday, November 6, 1908]: 1).

42. *Washington Times* (5 November 1908): 8.

function as one part of a 'tradition invention' which helps establish an 'Asian American biblical hermeneutics through an inventive tradition of citation' (Liew 2008: 7).

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Part II

EVALUATIVE INTERVENTIONS

TRACING SUGIRTHARAJAH'S VOICE FROM THE MARGIN: FROM LIBERATION TO POSTCOLONIALISM

Fernando F. Segovia

A critical history of postcolonial biblical criticism has yet to be written. This is true of the field of biblical studies as a whole, and it is also true of its traditional subfields, Hebrew Bible studies and early Christian studies. Such a history would take into account—in expansive, interrelated, and analytic fashion—fundamental dimensions of the postcolonial interpretive approach. The following come readily to mind: origins and trajectories within the given field of studies; social-material and cultural-discursive contexts behind its emergence and development; a mapping of variations in method and theory as well as a sense of the relations among such variations; the rhetorical strategies and ideological agendas at work in such variations; critiques of the approach, both from the outside and the inside, and rejoinders; applications by way of specific areas of study, both in terms of the texts and contexts of antiquity and their interpretations and contexts in modernity and postmodernity. Such an undertaking represents, therefore, a daunting challenge. Such an undertaking is also imperative.

The approach itself is relatively recent in origin, joining the critical repertoire of the field in the latter part of the 1990s as another strand within the paradigm of ideological criticism. Its critical production is thus, presumably, still familiar and readily available. However, the approach has witnessed swift appropriation and broad deployment, yielding an ever-expanding volume of material and an ever-growing sophistication of the discussion, not only in terms of scholarly publications but also in terms of professional ventures. Consequently, a loss of valuable details and nuances is inevitable, unless such information is recorded and preserved for future scholarship. A critical history is thus, again, a must.

There have been, to be sure, attempts to record such early developments, but these have been rather limited in scope.¹ Much more work is

1. See, for example, Moore and Segovia 2005. This forms part of an introductory piece for a volume on postcolonial biblical criticism and its relation to other ideological approaches at work in biblical criticism. It classifies such work in terms of three major strands: exercises in contextual hermeneutics; studies in imperial contexts and relations; and engagements with postcolonial theory.

needed along these lines, therefore, and toward this end I envision a twofold approach. On the one hand, there is need for the comprehensive overview—a long-view account that sets out to cover a range of critical components in intertwined fashion. A variety of such accounts is crucial: first, so that the multiple dimensions of the approach are addressed at some point; second, so that the material as a whole is approached from a number of different narratives and perspectives. On the other hand, there is need as well for the targeted study—a focused inquiry that seeks to highlight a particular angle of vision, topic of discussion, or voice of scholarship for close analysis. A variety of such inquiries is, again, crucial: first, in order to encompass the ever greater number of voices, topics, and angles at play, yielding in the process a multiplication of in-depth treatments of specific items; second, in order to address such voices, topics, and angles from varying points of view, yielding in the process a wide range of representations and opinions. These two approaches should by no means be seen as unrelated. While the comprehensive overviews construct overall frameworks for the formulation and launching of targeted studies, such studies flesh out, in turn, their respective skeletal frameworks.

For me, the path of the comprehensive overview remains a pressing desideratum, while that of the targeted study beckons in a variety of ways. In terms of the long-view account, I have already advanced a working model for the analysis of postcolonial biblical production, with a focus on early Christian studies (Segovia 2009). This model proposes a twofold chronological framework involving a foundational phase (1996–1999) and a solidifying phase (2000–2007). In terms of focused inquiry, one such line of investigation involves the figure and work of the Sri Lankan scholar based in England, R.S. Sugirtharajah. In this regard, therefore, the present congratulatory volume in honor of his long and distinguished work provides a marvelous opportunity. I shall proceed in two stages: I shall begin by situating him within the trajectory of the approach and then go on to trace his own relationship to the approach.

Sugirtharajah in Postcolonial Biblical Criticism

In any account of postcolonial biblical criticism, the name and corpus of Sugirtharajah are bound to play a decisive role. From the beginning, his presence and activity have been path-setting for the movement, given his role as a driving and organizing force throughout. His publication and professional projects crisscross the scholarly literature and the academic world alike, in ever so many ways. From the start, his vision and mission have also proved ground-breaking for the movement, given his inclusion of an ever widening set of concerns and pursuits. The range of such interests is best captured by way of general categories: reflections on the nature and

goals of biblical criticism in general and of postcolonial criticism in particular; readings of early Christian texts and contexts from a postcolonial perspective; analyses of modern and postmodern readings and contexts in a postcolonial key, especially the critical traditions of the West and emerging critical approaches of Asia; attention to the relation between postcolonial criticism and other strands of criticism in the non-Western world; attention to the reception of the Bible in society and culture at large; reflections on a future agenda for postcolonial criticism. As such, any targeted study on his figure and work proves forbidding, and ultimately much too elusive as well. It is wiser to proceed, therefore, by delimiting the parameters of any such inquiry.

I have thus chosen to focus on the first category of interests mentioned above, namely, critical reflections on the character and aims of postcolonial criticism within the ambit of biblical criticism as a whole. I propose to do so, moreover, by using a particular work of his as a structural marker: *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, a volume which has gone through three editions in all (1991; 1995; 2006) and for which he has served as editor. This I do for various reasons.

To begin with, given its several editions, this volume clearly functions as a recurring preoccupation in his critical thought and production. This preoccupation involves, I believe, a twofold, and interrelated, dynamic: the condition of marginalization, as conveyed by the title, and the notion of a Third World, as specified in the subtitle. In effect, Sugirtharajah seeks to foreground criticism within the reality and experience of a marginalized Third World, bringing together such voices for publication and dissemination. In so doing, he identifies himself with and argues on behalf of such criticism: his too is a voice from a marginalized Third World. Such a sense of embrace and espousal—in itself an exercise in the construction of a critical community in terms of descent and culture—emerges thereby as a constant in his work, especially since neither title nor subtitle undergoes any alteration through the years.

In addition, given the span of fifteen years between the first and third editions, the volume readily functions as a distinctive marker for his academic and professional work. The first edition signals his appearance on the critical scene, an initial salvo as Lecturer in Third World Theologies at Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham, England. This was a pointedly global sortie, from its underside, given the reach of the readings assembled in the volume, which span the whole of the non-Western world as well as the world of racial/ethnic minorities within the West.² The volume gained him, a begin-

2. In the Introduction to the third edition (Sugirtharajah 2006a: 1), he recalls the context behind the first edition. While looking through a catalog of publications from the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, he realized that, while a reader

ning and unfamiliar critic at the time, rapid and widespread recognition. The third edition finds him at the apex of his career, a further intervention as Professor of Biblical Studies at the University of Birmingham, England. This too was a decidedly global move, again from its underside, offering an expanded collection of readings from throughout the non-Western world and the world of non-Western minorities (with one exception). The volume, coming from a now much-traveled and much-seasoned critic, was accorded immediate recognition, best signified by the Special Session, a panel discussion, devoted to it and the project as whole, on the occasion of its fifteenth anniversary, at the 2006 AAR–SBL Annual Meeting in San Diego.

Lastly, the volume records, in the course of its various editions, the development of his critical vision and mission, given the use of pointed introductions and conclusions throughout. Indeed, a sequential analysis of these beginning and ending pieces, which varied in title and content from edition to edition, provides a keen glimpse into such mission and vision as well as a conceptual framework within which other publications and reflections of his can be situated and contextualized.

I should like to begin by bringing together this structural marker provided by the various editions of *Voices from the Margins* and my own working model for approaching postcolonial biblical criticism. Such a move places Sugirtharajah's figure and work directly and distinctly within the overall framework of postcolonial biblical criticism. I will expand on the model first and then on Sugirtharajah's production.

The proposed chronological model proposes, as indicated above, a twofold periodization of time. These divisions, I hasten to add, are advanced as theoretical constructs: on the one hand, they are meant as artificial and moveable, and thus as neither self-evident nor indisputable; on the other hand, they are regarded as porous, and hence by no means hard-and-fast. The given periodization is meant, therefore, as a heuristic device, a way of bringing a measure of order into an increasingly crowded and flexible scene, both in the discipline and in the profession.

The first period, lasting from 1996 through 1999, constitutes what I have characterized as a time of disciplinary and professional 'firsts'—a stage of formation and definition. The criteria for such delimitation are as follows. As beginning, there is a concrete marker. The year 1996 represents the first attempt at a disciplinary confluence between biblical studies and postcolonial studies. This was a volume edited by Laura E. Donaldson, a literary and

in 'animal theology' was among the offerings, there was no such reader on theologies of the Third World. Consequently, he wrote an acquisitions editor that, if the 'theological propensities' of animals were the subject of an anthology, why not those of people from the Third World. The anecdote, while humorous, is also, whether intended as such or not, deeply sarcastic and profoundly anti-imperial—quite 'postcolonial'.

cultural critic of Native American descent, and entitled *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading* (Donaldson 1996). Its scope of analysis was ample and set the stage for all subsequent work: biblical texts and contexts; interpretations and contexts; hermeneutical frameworks and projects. As conclusion, a general observation obtains. By the end of 1999, not only had considerable work been done in all three areas, but also the fundamental concerns and interests of the postcolonial optic had come to the fore as well. Postcolonial criticism had thus, by the end of the twentieth century, gained a solid foothold in both discipline and profession.

The second period, encompassing 2000 through 2007, represents what I have described as a time for experimentation and sophistication—a stage of expansion and consolidation. The criteria for delimitation run as follows. A general point captures its beginning. The year 2000 sets in motion a sustained deployment of the postcolonial optic across the various dimensions of the discipline and the profession. All the ‘firsts’ established during the earlier period witness notable growth in both volume and sophistication. A concrete marker signals its conclusion. By the end of 2007, all such efforts may be seen as coming to a climax in the appearance of *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, a one-volume commentary on all writings of the Christian Testament, edited by R.S. Sugirtharajah and myself. This volume recapitulated the enormous diversity and complexity of this period: from discussions concerning the meaning and scope of the postcolonial optic; through issues of method and argumentation as well as analyses of relations between early Christian formations and the Roman Empire; to discussions regarding the role of critical reaction and engagement. The volume further addressed new directions for research and new ethical challenges for consideration. Toward the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, postcolonial criticism had established itself as an advancing force to be reckoned with in every nook and cranny of the discipline as well as the profession.

Setting Sugirtharajah’s recurring and iconic volume against the backdrop provided by this chronological mapping of postcolonial biblical criticism proves revealing. To begin with, the first two editions of *Voices from the Margin*—appearing as they do in 1991 and 1995, respectively—precede what I have established as the formal point of departure for postcolonial biblical criticism in 1996, and hence its initial phase of foundation (1996–1999). I would further point out that in the volume that I see as the point of origins, Donaldson’s *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading*, Sugirtharajah’s name is not to be found among the contributors. In addition, the third edition—coming as it does in 2006—takes place just prior to the publication of the *Postcolonial Commentary*, which I have designated as the formal point of conclusion for the subsequent phase of solidification (2000–2007). To sum up both points, while the third edition comes out at the end of a process of

theorization and application, the first two editions antedate such a process altogether. Lastly, from the second edition to the third edition, over the course of the ten years in question, Sugirtharajah's writings will bear, in one way or another, the full imprint of the postcolonial upon them. Such a seal will be not only prominently displayed as well as distinctly embodied, but also explicitly and repeatedly entertained. A further exposition of these insights is in order.

First of all, to say that the first two editions precede the actual launching of postcolonial criticism is not to say that the volume itself, along with its reflections on criticism, does not reflect a postcolonial impulse. It is to say, rather, that they do so in a different key. In this regard, moreover, a distinction between the two editions is necessary. With respect to the first, such reflections and publication have no recourse to the terms and concepts of postcolonial discourse, or even to the language and categories of imperial-colonial studies. With regard to the second, such terms and concepts are invoked for the first time, but in unsystematic fashion. It would not be long, however, before this critical apparatus is fully activated and deployed.³

The following points bear witness to this development. In 1997, two years after the first edition and but a year following the point of origins, Sugirtharajah stands behind a crucial professional development for this approach: he secures a commitment from Sheffield Academic Press toward the publication of a series of volumes under the title of 'The Bible and Post-colonialism', for which he becomes General Editor. A year later, in 1998 he brings out two publications in this vein. First, as editor, the inaugural volume of the series, with the title of *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sugirtharajah 1998), involving a variety of essays on different dimensions of the envisioned relation between the postcolonial and the biblical. This volume contains his first reflections on postcolonial criticism as such. Second, as author, a collection of essays, entitled *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism* (Sugirtharajah 1998b), addressing the problematic of postcolonialism in two realms: (1) a set of colonial projects involving texts, commentaries, and translations at work in the Indian subcontinent; and (2) the relation between orientalism and biblical scholarship, with a focus both on and beyond India. Here, reflections on postcolonial criticism may be found scattered through the essays (especially 1998b: 3-28, 123-41).

Second, the fact that the third edition comes after a fertile period of theorization and application, both for the movement and for Sugirtharajah himself, leads one to expect an explicit incorporation of the terms and

3. This statement must be modified slightly. To my knowledge, the first publication by Sugirtharajah to appeal to the language and concepts of postcolonialism is an essay that appears in 1996, 'Textual Cleansing: From a Colonial to a Postcolonial Version', as part of a *Semeia* volume on scriptural translation (Sugirtharajah 1996). This essay traced the colonial strategies and practices of translation, examined their consequences on India, and pointed toward a postcolonial optic in translation.

concepts of postcolonialism within the volume, and such is indeed the case. In terms of reflections, both the introduction and the conclusion speak to the point, as before, although in brief and indirect fashion. With respect to structure, the arrangement of the readings, one now finds the insertion of a new division altogether, Part 4, containing 'Postcolonial Readings'. Three pieces are included, one of which represents the only reading in all three volumes from an author, Jeffrey L. Staley, who is neither from nor self-identifies or is identified with the Third World.⁴ In terms of contributions, Sugirtharajah has substituted a study of his on multifaith hermeneutics included in the first two editions for an overview of postcolonial biblical interpretation (Sugirtharajah 2006b). This study is curiously included in Part 1, under 'Reading Strategies', rather than in the new division of 'Postcolonial Readings'.⁵

In sum, from 1991 through 2006, the signature of the postcolonial runs through the entire corpus of Sugirtharajah. Such is the case at the beginning, in the publication of the first two editions of *Voices from the Margin*, which I view as postcolonial interventions in biblical criticism: the first, in implicit and indirect fashion; the second, in incipient and tentative fashion. Such is certainly the case at the end, at the publication of the third edition, which I would classify as a further postcolonial intervention from his pen, now pointedly direct and explicit. Such is also the case, and in crescendo fashion, through the years in-between. Indeed, Sugirtharajah represents one of those instances where critic and optic become so closely intertwined as to become practically indistinguishable. The question now, once optic and critic have been superimposed, is to investigate how the critic relates to and embodies the optic.

Sugirtharajah and Postcolonial Biblical Criticism

Following the comments above on Sugirtharajah's evolving appeal to the problematic and discourse of postcolonialism as marked by the successive editions of *Voices from the Margin*, I shall divide this inquiry on his relationship to this optic in three stages: speaking from the Third World; speaking from the Third-Postcolonial World; speaking from the Postcolonial World.

4. In all three volumes, the name of George V. Pixley appears, as co-author with Clodovis Boff. Pixley is from the United States but taught in Central America for many years (Nicaragua) and both associates himself and is associated closely with the hermeneutics of liberation. In all three editions he is identified as teaching or having taught in Nicaragua in the respective introductions to the piece, with no mention of the United States. In the Table of Contents, where names and provenances of all authors are provided, Nicaragua appears as sole reference in the first two editions, while Nicaragua/United States is to be found in the third.

5. This essay is taken from a contribution Sugirtharajah made a year earlier to a volume on modern theology and theologians; see Sugirtharajah 2005.

Speaking from the Third World

The first edition is decidedly geopolitical and ecclesial in character; it is also unmistakably confrontational in tone. The influence of liberation theology and hermeneutics is palpable. At this point, however, as pointed out by Sugirtharajah himself, liberation has undergone considerable change, and not surprisingly so. After all, by this time, 1991, a full twenty years have elapsed since the publication of Gustavo Gutiérrez's *Teología de la liberación* (1971)—to take a familiar though not unambiguous point of origins. As both movement and discourse, liberation has expanded well beyond its origins in Latin America to the rest of the non-Western world, Africa and Asia, and has reached the West as well, especially among racial/ethnic minorities. In the process, the early focus on economics and class relations has broadened to include other relations of power: race, in African and African American circles; religious pluralism, in Asia; and gender, throughout the non-Western and the Western worlds alike. It is against this background of a widespread and evolving liberation framework that Sugirtharajah pens his first reflections on criticism. These are expressly global and overtly theological. The overall tenor is one of exultation and high expectations.

Introduction. The Introduction (1991a) sets up a radical opposition involving a variety of closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing material-discursive spheres. This relationship may be conceptualized as a series of circles within circles, and thus circles of different sizes. The circles would be arranged as follows: at a grounding level, a large circle—the geopolitical sphere; at an intermediate level, a smaller circle, among several others—the theological sphere; at a concrete level, a smaller circle still, again among others—the critical sphere. The opposition winds its way, from the ground up and in parallel fashion, through the various levels and spheres. It emerges out of the geopolitical circle, crosses the theological circle, and moves into the critical circle. Theoretically, although not broached by Sugirtharajah, the opposition would mark all other circles at the intermediate and concrete levels.

At the foundational geopolitical level, a global opposition between two blocks of nations is posited, along with a dialectical relation involving unequal relations of power between them. On one side, there is 'Euro-America'—the realm of the capitalist and democratic nations of Europe and North America. Neither 'West' nor 'First World', it should be noted, is employed as a synonymous designation. On the other side, there is the 'Third World'—the realm of the nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which have opted for an 'alternative political and economic system' (1991a: 2). This Third World is described as multidimensional in meaning. First, it bears a geographical-economic connotation: countries from 'the southern hemisphere' and beyond the circle of industrial capitalism. Second, it also

carries a geopolitical-conflictual connotation: countries outside the systems engaged in the Cold War between capitalism-democracy and Marxism-socialism. Lastly, it has a metaphorical-ideological connotation as well: people excluded from power as well as from agency in the creation of their own future, identified as 'racial minorities, the poor, women, and the marginalized peoples of the world' (1991a: 3). For all such peoples, Sugirtharajah approvingly invokes the designation of 'the oppressed' as advanced by Aloysius Pieris (Pieris 1988).⁶

At the intermediate theological level, such global opposition and dialectical relation are recapitulated, both materially and discursively. On the one hand, the institutions and theologians of the Euro-American world constitute the 'dominant' or 'mainline' formation, both in the church and in the academy. On the other hand, their counterparts of the Third World represent the 'margin' or 'periphery' in both domains. Thus, while the former control all dimensions of knowledge (production, distribution, and consumption), the latter remain excluded from and subordinate to such a process (receivers rather than agents). At the heart of this opposition and relation, argues Sugirtharajah, lies 'Christian Scripture' (1991a: 1).

At the concrete critical level, therefore, such global opposition and dialectical relation are again recapitulated, materially as well as discursively. From a context of power, Euro-American critics have pursued a reading of scripture that is 'abstract, individualized, and neutralized' (1991a: 1). This tradition of reading does not take into consideration the context of interpretation, foregrounds the individual, and lays claim to objectivity. It is further limited to the world of the academy and the expert. From a context of powerlessness, Third World critics have embarked on developing new paradigms and approaches in reading scripture, taking up directly the reality and experience of the oppressed—'hunger, sickness, and exploitation'

6. This opposition proves more functional than essentialist. To begin with, the question of the 'Second World', the realm of the Marxist and socialist nations of Europe (and Asia), is acknowledged, since the Third World is said to provide a systemic 'alternative' between the First and Second Worlds (1991a: 2). This realm, however, is not addressed at all, nor is the relation of the Third World to this Second World. In addition, the realm of Euro-America is sharply differentiated in terms of gender, so that, while men are fully identified with it, women are associated with the Third World, following the latter's third and metaphorical connotation. Yet, the relation between Euro-American women and the Third World is not pursued at all, nor is any piece from an Euro-American woman included in the collection. Lastly, the Third World is characterized as enormously diverse in its own right, both in terms of contexts and agendas, though united by the common denominator of 'injustice and oppression' (1991a: 1). How such agendas and contexts interface and interact, however, is not unpacked at all, nor is there any sense of conflict within such a 'shared perspective' (1991a: 3). As such, the opposition drawn does have its cracks.

(1991a: 1). This tradition of reading takes the interpretive context as point of departure, highlights the collective, and is forthcoming about agenda. It also reaches out to popular readings of the Bible alongside academic readings; indeed, the academy is seen as in close and necessary collaboration with the grassroots throughout.

At all three levels, therefore, the dialectical relation that marks all parallel oppositions is one of marginalization—by the Euro-American core, of the Third World periphery (in its various meanings). This first edition of the reader in Third World biblical hermeneutics is thus conceived as a reading *from the Margin*, materially as well as discursively, in the face of dominant and mainline biblical scholarship. This margin, moreover, includes voices from the academy as well as voices from the people. Sugirtharajah characterizes it as ‘a representative documentation of the hermeneutical efforts of such people’, all of whom speak in ‘total solidarity’ with the people and out of ‘alienation and ghettoization’ (1991a: 3). The criteria for selection are quite explicit. Professional readings are included if they satisfy either of the following conditions: analysis and appropriation of the underlying context; moving beyond historicism or adopting vernacular tools. Popular readings are included if they speak from the underside. The result is a fivefold format arranged in terms of major themes.

This structure is designed to bring out the multiplicity of contexts and problems in the Third World and, therefore, the diversity of agendas and approaches under each major category. The fivefold division as such is not explained, but each major division is. In the process, Sugirtharajah offers key insights on criticism.

The first two divisions are general in scope. Part I (‘Use of the Bible: Methods, Principles, Issues’) is theoretical: revisionary studies that challenge the principles and ways of established hermeneutics and offer instead frameworks and strategies in tune with the contexts in question. Part II (‘Re-Use of the Bible: Examples of Hermeneutical Explorations’) is applied: readings of texts from non-traditional, non-Western, indigenous perspectives or from a traditional, Western, historicist perspective but now with the powerless rather than the bourgeoisie in mind. Here Sugirtharajah quite clearly states that the problem is not with the tools of historical criticism but with the ends to which such tools have been placed.

The remaining three divisions are more pointed. Part III (‘The Exodus: One Theme, Many Perspectives’) raises the question of textual meaning: a variety of readings of the Exodus event. Here Sugirtharajah allows in principle for a plurality of readings of any text, since meaning cannot be exhausted. Part IV (‘One Reality, Many Texts: Examples of Multi-faith Hermeneutics’) addresses, through readings from Africa and Asia, the question of scripture in a predominantly multifaith and multiscriptural context. It is here that Sugirtharajah’s own contribution to the volume is inserted.

Here too a foremost concern of his comes to the fore: how to deal with claims regarding the uniqueness and universality of Christian scripture. Part V ('People as Exegetes') turns to the grassroots: readings from 'ordinary people' intent on 'empowerment of the community' (5). Such readings are especially important for Sugirtharajah insofar as they break all academic boundaries and abandon individualism, showing the possibility of a 'corporate exegetical enterprise' (1991a: 6).

Postscript: Achievements and Items for a Future Agenda. The Postscript (1991b) looks around and forward: it summarizes present advances of and charts future directions for this hermeneutical project from the Third World. Two claims underlie this overview. One is religious-theological. For Sugirtharajah, this is the project of a 'people'—characterized as 'loosely knit' but sharing 'common causes'—who are striving 'to make sense' of their faith and their scripture in light of their contexts, in order to restore meaning to their lives and to recover their human and personal dignity (1991b: 434). The other is interpretive-critical. For Sugirtharajah, contextual reading provides 'the key to the recovery of the Bible', insofar as its meaning is retrievable only from concrete realities and experiences (1991b: 434). These two claims are closely intertwined: the contextual approach releases 'multifaceted concrete and novel dimensions' of the 'word of God' (1991b: 434). The combined claim remains ambiguous: Is the one meaning of the Bible retrieved in multiple applications, or do multiple readings produce different meanings?

The list of achievements on hand is extensive: (1) returning Christian scriptures to 'ordinary people' (1991b: 435); (2) overcoming the traditional hermeneutical gap between text and critic through solidarity and struggle; (3) placing 'praxiological commitment' to people, to overcoming poverty and oppression, at the heart of interpretation; (4) bringing together the academy and the struggle; (5) foregrounding interpretive context and taking sides; and (6) placing criticism in the service of transformation. Their exposition yields further insights into Sugirtharajah's early views on criticism. The theological thrust is most conspicuous. The Bible is said to 'belong' not in the hands of experts but of the people: it was 'written' for them, and they read themselves in it (1991b: 435). It is the people and their needs, their poverty and oppression as 'losers of history' (1991b: 437), that constitute the 'privileged' focus of interpretation and the crucial first step in understanding scripture (1991b: 437). Consequently, scholarship must be placed at the service of the people and their realities, bringing together rigor and advocacy. The critical thrust is no less conspicuous. A focus on the social location of interpretation, on the biases or perspectives brought by interpreters to the text, and on the need to take sides replaces the goals of objectivity and impartiality. A commitment to solidarity with people and oppression as

well as to participation in similar struggles in the present obviates the traditional gap between text and critic. A commitment to liberation, to a transformation of society grounded in faith, replaces the solution of intellectual queries as the goal of hermeneutics.

The list of agenda items to be pursued is considerable as well. First, following upon the devolution of the Bible to the people, Third World hermeneutics must go beyond the traditional focus on written texts. It must address orality: behind the biblical texts; in present-day communities; and in terms of the power of the word. It must also draw on all other forms of cultural production in interpreting scripture. Second, in keeping with the fusion between the academy and the struggle, Third-World hermeneutics must move beyond Christian hermeneutics to comparative scripture hermeneutics. It must address relations in the past, tracing 'influences and borrowings' among faith traditions in early Christianity, and in the present, seeking to complement one another's 'spiritual wealth' (1991b: 441). Third, following upon the foregrounding of context and the need to take sides, Third-World hermeneutics must continue to stress the relation between social location and biblical criticism, especially on behalf of the 'weak and vulnerable' (1991b: 438). Lastly, in keeping with a conscientized and activist view of criticism, Third World hermeneutics must have the liberative transformation of society as its main goal.

Shifting from the Third World to the Postcolonial World

The second edition brings a twist in orientation. In character, it remains resolutely geopolitical, though in a different key, but becomes less markedly ecclesial. In tone, it continues to be distinctly confrontational, though within the new parameters. The impact of liberation theology and hermeneutics upon Sugirtharajah is still visible; indeed, liberation is identified as the 'point of departure' for the volume (1995a: 6). It is, however, noticeably less palpable. A shift has clearly begun to take place in the years intervening; its ramifications are evident. The context of liberation and the language of oppression are now subsumed under, or transformed into, the context of colonialism-neocolonialism and the language of postcolonialism. References to Aloysius Pieris as well as Leonardo and Clodovis Boff are replaced by invocations of Edward W. Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In effect, the movement and discourse of liberation are yielding to the discourse and movement of postcolonialism.

Such a shift can be readily situated. The standard though again ambiguous point of origins for the postcolonial optic is traced to the publication of Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. This work was followed in the 1980s and early 1990s by further key contributions from Said himself as well as by the expanding output of two other major figures, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. This body of material, heavily informed by

poststructuralist thought, became known first as colonial discourse theory and later on as postcolonial theory. By 1995, therefore, postcolonialism had already been at work for well over fifteen years. It is in light of this turn to postcolonial theory that Sugirtharajah writes his second reflections on criticism. These reflections continue to be expressly global, but they are no longer as overtly theological. The overall sense is one of promise for the future.

Introduction: Margin as Site of Creative Re-visioning. The Introduction (1995a) sets forth a radical opposition that both presupposes and reconceptualizes the earlier threefold series of closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing spheres. While there is mention of the Third World, including a reference to the newfound vibrancy of 'Third-World biblical interpretation' (1995a: 1), the import of the geopolitical level is now pursued in less materialist terms, away from economics. While the ecclesial base underlying such interpretation is obvious, the import of the theological level is largely bypassed. The focus of attention thus lies on interpretation as such, and the import of this critical level is developed against a geopolitical foundation formulated in more abstract terms. This shift is signalled from the start, when Sugirtharajah refers to the 'special promise' signified by Third World interpretation as a result of 'its exclusive attempts to address the issues of struggle, marginality and colonialism' (1995a: 1). The last two elements prove crucial for the discussion: colonialism is introduced here for the first time and will remain at the forefront from now on, while marginality undergoes resignification in the light of colonialism.

The grounding geopolitical opposition is drawn in terms of marginalization: there is a center and there is a periphery. The actual configurations of both are left undefined, but the relation between them is addressed, from the perspective of the margin. Thus, Sugirtharajah argues against any view of the periphery as either a site of absence, a place from which to move to the center, or a site of opposition, from where to resist the center. Instead, he advances a vision of the margin, following the lead of Spivak (1990: 156), as a place of activity and creation—a 'centre for critical reflection and clarification' (1995a: 2). In the process, the opposition has been reformulated in discursive terms and recast in terms of two 'centers' with different contexts, aims, and projects.

The critical level recapitulates the opposition at the geopolitical level. Thus, in keeping with this vision of the periphery as a center, Sugirtharajah points to the volume as a way to 'capture this critical aspect of marginality' (1995a: 2). At this level, however, the opposition becomes more complicated. Sugirtharajah describes the state of recent biblical criticism and the place of the volume within it. The scenario as a whole is characterized as 'an unregulated market-place' (1995a: 2), where theories and methods of all

stripes abound. As a result, the center represented by Western scholarship is no longer homogeneous but draws rather on literary and sociocultural criticisms as well as on gender-specific and contextual approaches. Further, its object of attention now extends from author, through text, to reader. The volume itself is placed squarely within the reader-centered category, with a focus on real, and hence contextual, readers. As such, the volume shares various theoretical presuppositions with the traditional center: meaning as the product of interaction between text and reader; within such engagement, meaning as the invention of the reader; given the variety of 'particular social, cultural and religious location', different readers will perceive different meanings in a text (1995a: 3). At the same time, the volume belongs entirely to the periphery now redefined as center, given the real readers in question.

Such real readers are, in effect, 'post-colonial' readers, and here the issue of colonialism is brought to the fore. Such readers, on the one hand, emerge out of 'oppressive, caste-ridden, patriarchal, multi-religious' contexts and, on the other hand, try to make sense of both their contexts and the scriptural texts (1995a: 3). Despite the many and profound differences among them, they can all be brought together as a new center, in opposition to the established center, in light of their experience of colonialism and neo-colonialism, which 'colours and determines' their interpretation (1995a: 3).

The second edition of the reader is, therefore, still conceived as a reading *from the Margin*, with emphasis on the discursive rather than the material dimension, but from the Margin as a *Site of Creative Re-visioning*. The five-fold format remains unchanged, as do the major themes selected, though with alterations in nomenclature. The fivefold arrangement is again not explained, but the structure by themes is, in deconstructive fashion: a bow to the content-format in traditional academic publication, but entirely artificial, since the articles defy any such compartmentalization. The aim of the new division is explained as fourfold: to include new geographical regions (the Caribbean and the Pacific); to foreground subaltern exegesis by indigenous peoples; to expand the scope of cross-religious hermeneutics; and to incorporate new work from previous authors.

Part III ('The Exodus') and Part IV ('People as Exegetes') remain essentially the same in content, although in both cases the subtitles have been changed, 'One Narrative, Many Readings' and 'Popular Readings', respectively. In Part III Sugirtharajah proves quite direct on textual meaning as multidimensional, emphasizing the conflict in interpretation (liberative-colonializing), while in Part IV he raises the question of common ground between academic and popular readers, with critique and transformation in mind. Parts I ('Using the Bible'), Part II ('Re-use of the Bible'), and Part IV (now 'The Text and the Texts') undergo much more substantial change. In Part I (which bears a new subtitle, 'Reading Strategies and Issues'), the

stress is on celebrating diversity and plurality through 'historical, subjective, and context-specific readings' (1995a: 4). In Part II (with a new subtitle, 'Subaltern Readings'), the emphasis is on the oppositional character of the essays in piercing through the 'hermeneutical forgetting' of dominant society and culture, whether through traditional or vernacular approaches (1995a: 4). In Part IV (bearing a new subtitle, 'Multi-faith Readings'), the point is made that the essays combat theological 'imperialism' by seeing how the biblical story is but one among many others.

The Introduction concludes, unlike the earlier one, which left such matters for a Postscript, by contemplating the future of Third World hermeneutics. This future is said to depend on two factors: contextual base—the needs and demands of the peoples of the Third World in the face of global capitalism; and critical acumen—the values and tools of the critics of the Third World in the light of critical practice. Two distinct paths are outlined. One calls for ongoing critical advocacy: confronting 'the powers that be' on the side of the voiceless, the marginalized, the periphery. The other calls for a new critical confluence: bringing together 'Third-World biblical discourse' and 'post-colonial theories and criticism', given the latter's critique of 'Eurocentric' hermeneutics and quest for a hermeneutics rooted in 'colonial experience' (1995a: 7). This latter prospect captures exceedingly well the shift in orientation at work in this second edition.

Afterword: Cultures, Texts and Margins—A Hermeneutical Odyssey. The Afterword (1995b) goes in a different direction than the Postscript of the first edition and stands in uneasy relation to the Introduction. Like the earlier Postscript, it looks to both present and future. It does so, however, in light of a detailed look backward, which provides a hermeneutical trajectory leading to the present, and in terms of a circumscribed focus, which examines Asian criticism generally, Indian criticism specifically, and diasporic criticism concretely. Like the Introduction, it presents a vision of the future. This vision, however, has nothing to do with a promising confluence of liberation and postcolonialism, but turns instead to the difficult fork facing diasporic criticism. At the same time, the Afterword signals, like the Introduction, the turn to postcolonialism, signified not only by the references invoked (Said; Frantz Fanon; Ashis Nandy) but also by the terminology activated, full of references to colonialism and imperialism.

Resuming the past, Sugirtharajah unfolds a roughly sequential succession of hermeneutical models in India. A fourfold 'journey' is outlined. A first, and really ever-present movement, was colonial imitation. This involved the learning and application of methods not only of Western provenance but also with Western domination and assimilation in mind. In this stage, no culturally informed reading is possible. A second movement followed in reaction, orientalist revivalism. This entailed a nationalist-inspired return

to the indigenous methods of a glorious era (Sanskritic tradition), actually a construct of Western orientalist. In this nativist stage, a culturally informed reading ignored the social and cultural realities of the country and harked back to an elitist tradition. A third movement emerged in reaction, nativist revivalism. This entailed a nationalist-inspired turn to vernacular methods of specific cultural-linguistic matrices, which opened up 'multiple performance and textual traditions' (1995b: 468). In this vernacular stage, culturally informed readings are many, but all such readings risk isolation and irrelevance. A fourth movement is then entertained as a way out of such dead-ends, post-national diasporism. With the problematization of the nation-state and the rise of trans-national globalization, a new development takes place—deterritorialization, which brings about 'dislocation, homelessness, and disorientation' (1995b: 471). This development, in turn, brings about a new critical turn—diasporism, 'equally committed to and disturbed by both cultures' (1995b: 472). Out of such a post-national, globalizing context, the path for criticism is laid out—away from binary oppositions and toward 'side-by-side' coexistence in 'a state of creative interference and interruption' (1995b: 473). In the end, the relation of this diasporic in-the-middle vision to the call for a liberation-postcolonial advocacy and confluence is left unpacked.

Speaking from the Postcolonial World

The third edition brings a further twist in orientation. In character, the geopolitical angle is just as prominent, but in a new key—much more inward-looking, while the ecclesial angle stages a strong comeback. In tone, the confrontational edge is no less severe, but in redirected fashion, following the new parameters. The impact of liberation theology and hermeneutics is unmistakable, but now assessed as controverted. Liberation is vividly recalled and warmly acknowledged: it 'energized' new voices and theologies in the face of their 'dry, secular, and academically animated' counterparts from Europe and America (2006a: 4). At the same time, it is cast as a historical development of momentous significance that is now past, irrelevant, and compromised. The shift in critical stance observed earlier between 1991 and 1995 has, at this point, run its full course and done so in a different direction than the one envisioned by the second edition—a future and promising conjunction between liberation and postcolonialism. Instead, the context of colonialism-neocolonialism and the language of postcolonialism render a highly negative evaluation on the context of liberation and the language of oppression. While liberation is openly challenged, postcolonialism receives undivided support. In effect, the movement and discourse of liberation have been displaced by the discourse and movement of postcolonialism.

The shift is understandable. From 1995 through 2006, as the fortunes of liberation undergo steady decline in production and influence, those

of postcolonialism witness exponential growth. During this period, Sugirtharajah focuses repeatedly on postcolonial biblical criticism: from his earliest, brief considerations, offered by way of Introduction to *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sugirtharajah 1998a), to his latest, expansive observations, included as his contribution to this third edition (Sugirtharajah 2006b). This journey from liberation to postcolonialism turns out in the end strikingly bittersweet. The postcolonial optic, now fully entrenched, issues a highly negative judgment on a variety of other religious-theological developments that have taken place in the margins over these years. Liberation, therefore, is but one among several such developments taken to task. In the process, the reflections retain a firm global reach and regain an overt ecclesial thrust. The overall sense is now one of disappointment and uncertainty, as Sugirtharajah himself candidly admits, describing his earlier optimism as 'both naive and over-confident' (2006a: 3).

Introduction: Still at the Margins. The Introduction (2006a) constructs a radical opposition that again presupposes and reconceptualizes the initial threefold series of closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing spheres. The geopolitical level recedes in importance: there is neither reference to the Third World nor recourse to the center-periphery binomial. Its import is by no means discarded. First, the exposition reveals a recurring contrast between global blocks: on the one hand, Europe and America; on the other hand, Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. Second, there is a passing but telling reference to the 'current political climate' and its view of any 'resistance movement' as a conveyor of 'terror and terrorism' (2006a: 5). Lastly, there is keen awareness of global migration and its consequences, diasporas, and trans-nations. Such import, however, is not activated in its own terms. The theological level moves to the forefront. Its import is to serve as a receptive and reinforcing framework for interpretation. The critical level remains as the focus of attention. Its import now is concrete rather than abstract: pursued not in terms of marginal discourse but rather in terms of untoward discursive developments in the margins. The resulting opposition is complex. First, there is an enveloping outward-looking opposition (margin-center); second, there are two inward-looking oppositions (creative-reactionary); third, there are two inward-looking developments (identity and authenticity) that are regarded as problematic.

The external opposition, which replicates the grounding geopolitical one as well as the supporting theological one, is a carry-over: 'mainstream' interpretation undertaken in Europe and America versus interpretation carried out by 'those who work in the margins' (2006a: 3). After fifteen years, Sugirtharajah observes, little has changed in the center: the mainstream is still engaged in exoticism and exclusivism. While the center classifies all criticism from the margin according to geographical, gender, or racial/ethnic

categories, it represents itself as without label and hence as the norm—the benchmark, with the others needing to catch up’ (2006a: 5).

The internal oppositions represent a new development. While much of note has been taking place in the margin, not all qualifies as ‘creative re-visioning’. In fact, two specific developments have proved harmful: fundamentalism and liberation. While the former set up a rival margin, the latter turned its back on the margin.

The opposition involving fundamentalism is phrased quite harshly. In global terms, the margin has been ‘hijacked’ across all major religious formations by ‘men... who have appointed themselves the true custodians and interpreters of the scriptures’ (2006a: 3). The descriptions of what such groups have perpetrated in the margin is truly remarkable in its use of othering language. In local terms, the Christian Bible has been turned on its head by ‘extreme fundamentalists’, ‘the powerful’, and ‘right-wing programs’ as a source for a God of retaliation, for authoritarian power, and for reactionary projects (2006a: 3). The recourse to othering language here is no less severe. For Sugirtharajah, therefore, such elements have left the true and real margin. The task of interpreters is clear: reclaiming the margin as a site of ‘critique and resistance’ (2006a: 3) and arguing for ‘alternative and counter-readings’ in the text. The opposition involving liberation is formulated quite harshly as well. Not only did it sell out, easily ‘co-opted’ by the mainstream and recast in terms of ‘apolitical and personal empowerment’ (2006a: 4-5), but also it ignored the religious Other, turning ‘too exclusively Christian’ and ‘triumphalistic’ (2006a: 5). For Sugirtharajah, consequently, liberation abandoned the true and real margin. The task of interpreters is no less clear: turning to postcolonialism as main tool.

The internal problematic developments represent a new concern as well. While they stand as unquestionable examples of ‘creative re-visioning’, they may also prove counterproductive in the end. The developments in question revolve around fragmentation: in the physical margin, atomization; in the transplanted margin, diaspora.

First, the initial major categories of the margin, continental-national, have subdivided into a variety of ‘smaller if vibrant’ formations through the intersection of racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual markers (2006a: 4). While such subdivisions highlight diverse discourses and movements in the margin, they also lead to a submersion of ‘shared values’ through their ‘obsessive focus on narrow identity’ (2006a: 4). This, in turn, redounds to the benefit of the mainstream: fragmentation not only leaves the mainstream untouched but also is subject to cooptation by it. While unexpressed, the answer for Sugirtharajah lies in foregrounding common elements, as he has done in previous editions. Second, there has been an explosion of the margin in the center, but here too a subdivision has taken place into a variety of categories through the intersection of racial/ethnic markers. While such

subdivisions foreground the 'formidable' role of diasporic theologies and intellectuals, they also render 'almost redundant' all 'regional-based theologies' and raise the question of authentic representation of the margin—those who stay behind or those who leave (2006a: 6). For Sugirtharajah, the answer, while left theoretically unresolved for now, is nonetheless clear by the very formulation of the options: the 'physically resident', who are firmly situated in and analyze the contexts of their peoples; or the 'domiciled, diasporan intellectuals', who crave respectability in the theories and method of the academy (2006a: 6). Both developments can easily turn into further oppositions, given their ascribed susceptibility to takeover by the center.

For Sugirtharajah, the right and proper response from and for the margin, in face of continued marginalization by the center as well as of actual and potential deviations within the margin itself, is but one: postcolonialism. Its specific means of foregrounding the Other and troubling the West are listed: a postmodern product rooted in 'leftist secular humanism' (2006a: 5); emerging from anti-colonial struggles, at work in the academy, and correcting the 'discursive defamation of the "other"' (2006a: 5); challenging all colonizers and speaking truth to all power; analyzing the colonizing tendencies of monotheism and the polytheistic context of the Bible. Its goal is set forth: 'critiquing, problematizing, and exposing contradictions and inadequacies' in texts and readings (2006a: 5). The confrontational mode is hence relentless. It is also curious. With regard to the external opposition, and in light of the second edition, it is unexpected. If the margin was to be viewed henceforth as a 'site of creative re-visioning', as another 'center', why should it matter at all what the traditional 'center' of scholarship thinks of it and why think of such a *dénouement* as 'still at the margins'? Why not simply expose such attitudes and go on? With regard to the internal oppositions and problematic developments, and in light of the earlier editions, it is surprising. Given the emphasis on the contextual dimension of criticism as well as the multidimensionality of meaning in interpretation, why insist on a true and proper approach approach from the margin? Why not see all such marginal 'deviations' in postcolonial terms as well?

The third edition of the reader is, consequently, still presented as a reading *from the Margin*, with continued emphasis on the discursive dimension but also a novel emphasis on transformation, so that the Margin is represented as a site of conflict: exoticized by the mainstream; divided by the forces of fanaticism, accommodationism, and provincialism; rescued only by a postcolonial optic. In light of this shift, the fivefold format is expanded to include a new category, 'Postcolonial Readings', as Part IV. Such essays focus on the 'presence of empire' and its relationship to religion and scripture in society and culture as well as in interpretation. The other five themes are preserved, although with alterations in nomenclature again. The rationale for a new

edition is not given. The rationale for the arrangement remains unaddressed; the thematic structure is presented as a bow not to the publishing industry but rather to the 'modernist desire for order and structure' (2006a: 7); and the arrangement of the articles is emphasized as entirely artificial.

Part III ('Exodus') and Part VI ('People as Exegetes') remain basically the same, both in context, with only a couple of substitutions in each case, and in nomenclature, with 'Exodus' yielding to 'Many Readings' as title. In Part III Sugirtharajah harps on the conflicted nature of the text (emancipation-enslavement), leaving behind the issue of multidimensionality of meaning in texts. In Part VI, while preserving the question of dialogue, he sharpens the difference between popular readers, whose 'religio-spiritual interests and aspirations' result in 'communitarian readings', and academic readers, who engage in 'largely secularized and solitary scholarship' (2006a: 9). Parts I, II, and V undergo quite substantial change, and in that order. In Part I (now titled simply 'Reading Strategies'), the stress shifts from rejoicing in diversity to the interpretive possibilities offered by 'minority' hermeneutics (2006a: 7). In Part II (now titled simply 'Subaltern Readings'), the emphasis moves from the coming-out of the occluded in the face of erasure to the diversity of the subalterns in the face of stereotyping. In Part V (now titled simply 'Inter-textual Readings'), the focus on overcoming religious uniqueness remains but now stressing the 'mutual enlightenment' that results from such comparative readings (2006a: 8).

The Introduction is brought to an end by problematizing the future in light of the implosion in the margins. Two brief reflections regarding 'minority' critics serve as background for the quandary: (1) awareness that their work will be better received in the center, if only out of a desire to know the Other; and (2) desire to declare that their discourse no longer exists. The quandary itself is pointed: Are minority critics to march into or to bring down the center? The path for Sugirtharajah is clear, given his characterization of the former option as engaging in a 'colonial game of occupation' (2006a: 9). At this point, a new quandary emerges, and remains unanswered: How many centers should there be? The twofold quandary captures well the mood of this third edition.

Afterword: The Future Imperfect. The Afterword (2006c) returns, though partly so, to the genre adopted by the Afterword of the first edition: resuming its visionary character and universalist reach, but leaving aside any assessment of present achievements. Altogether gone are the extensive look backward and the narrower focus on Asian-Indian criticism of the second edition's Postscript. In looking ahead, moreover, the Afterword both preserves, again but partly so, and expands the Introduction. The continuity is clear in two respects. First, the exposition of the future proceeds again by way of opposition between Western and non-Western scholarship. Second,

the problematic of untoward developments in the margin is again addressed. The discontinuity lies in the fact that no reference is made to the quandary concerning the number of centers. The expansion is similarly clear: a new quandary is introduced—will the Bible survive?

The vision of the future is sharply drawn. Western interpretation will continue its inexorable path toward self-ghettoization, as a 'closed society' with 'esoteric' codes and practices, unless it takes a sharply 'multicultural' and 'poly-religious' turn through engagement with the scholars and traditions of Asian religions (2006c: 494). Non-Western interpreters will face the twin dangers of nativism and triumphalism. In the face of globalization, any turn toward culture-specific hermeneutics must involve creative interaction and political conscientization. In the face of triumphalism, any move toward cultural imposition on others must be avoided. The future of the Bible is sharply outlined as well. In the Western world, survival will depend on highlighting its character and values as literature and its potential for creative interpretation outside the discipline. In the non-Western world, survival will turn on contextualization among the religious traditions and sacred texts of eastern Asia.

Tracing Sugirtharajah's Voice from the Margin

This tracing of Sugirtharajah's voice from the margin, a mantle that he takes on in forthright and resolute fashion throughout, reveals a complex personal-critical journey. It is, on the one hand, unqualifiedly postcolonial, though traversed along shifting but interconnecting paths. It is also, on the other hand, unquestionably ambiguous in some important turns along such paths, serving thereby as a good point of departure for further postcolonial reflection. I turn, first, to a recollection of its paths and, then, to a consideration of certain ambiguous turns on the way.

The reflections of the first edition qualify as a 'speaking from the Third World'. The context and the discourse are vintage liberation: rooted in social and cultural inequalities and geared toward radical transformation in both material matrix and discursive production—all within the framework of a geoeconomic, geopolitical, and metaphorical Third World. The conclusion to the Introduction proves an excellent signifier in this regard. Third World biblical interpretation, Sugirtharajah declares, represents a coming-to-terms hermeneutics: analyzing a world divided and exploited by race, economics, and gender; pondering what sort of world to imagine and construct. That, he affirms, 'should be the purpose of all hermeneutics' (1991a: 6). These initial reflections represent the historical postcolonial voice of resistance to Western imperialism.

The reflections of the second edition classify as a 'speaking from the Third-Postcolonial World'. Context and discourse are in clear transition,

from vintage liberation to postcolonial theory: while the sense of social-cultural inequalities and the project of radical transformation perdure, it is the colonial legacy of the Third World, with its critique of Eurocentric traditions and practices, that gains the upper hand. Here, too, the conclusion to the Introduction captures the mood well. In urging the coming together of liberation and postcolonialism toward the creation of a new critical center, Sugirtharajah states, the role of hermeneutics should be to 'confront the powers that be' (1995a: 7). These intermediate reflections signal a tilt toward the discursive postcolonial voice of resistance to Western imperialism.

The reflections of the third edition qualify as a 'speaking from the Post-colonial World'. Context and discourse have now not only fully embraced postcolonial theory but also mount a sharp challenge to vintage liberation: the sense of social-cultural inequalities and the project of radical transformation remain but only in the background, while a critique of all 'colonializing' traditions and practices, whether in the center or the margins, is espoused. Again, a passage at the end of the Introduction conveys the pulse. In the face of troubling developments in the margin and questions about the nature of centers, Sugirtharajah declares, the role of hermeneutics is to determine who 'will provide the parameters' for and what 'resources' will be used to 'redesign' such centers (2006a: 9). These later reflections embody the full discursive postcolonial voice of resistance to all imperialism, Western and non-Western.

As a whole, the journey reveals a number of important questions that remain unresolved and that thus call for further attention in postcolonial biblical criticism, especially since their import and ramifications extend well beyond Sugirtharajah's own corpus and thought. Among them, I regard the following as primary: the role of oppositional thinking; the problematic of meaning and reader-text relations; the intersectional character of the margin; the relation between material and discursive analysis; and the underlying religious-theological framework.

A driving element of the journey is a keen sense of confrontation throughout, played out in terms of oppositions: early on, between center and margin; ultimately, within the margin itself as well. These oppositions are radical. At the same time, their foundations are not without cracks: omission of a Second World; opting for an in-between diasporic hermeneutics that eschews all binomials; identification of dissenting groups and critiques within the West, especially feminism. The question of confrontation, its emplacement and development, is thus in need of further theorization.

Another central element has to do with the key role assigned to contextual reading in interpretation, affirmed throughout by foregrounding the self-conscious nature of readings from the margin as opposed to the universal

reading mask of the center. However, what is actually meant by contextual reading remains uncertain, oscillating between an objectivist and a constructivist position. The pendulum swings from a view of meaning as inherent, accurately retrieved through different readings in and for the margin, to a view of meaning as created, produced by different readings from and for the margin. The consequences are clear. Should the objectivist view prevail, there is no difference from the center—a center in reverse obtains. Should the constructivist pole be favored, any challenge to readings from the center or the margin calls for explanation—a correct position obtains. Here, too, therefore, further theorization is in order.

A third key element involves the twofold aspect of multiplicity and unity attributed to the margin, as highly diverse groups of people are brought together as a people in terms of concerns and interests in common. This uneasy relation is a fragile one: the concept of the Third World is assigned a metaphorical dimension; the intersecting axes of class, race, and gender are increasingly foregrounded within the margin; and the drive of colonializing impulses in religion is presented as tearing the margin asunder. While emphasis on identity politics is decried as detrimental to the margin, the internal sources of conflict in the margin are made evident throughout. Greater theorization in this regard is also of the essence.

A fourth central element has to do with critical focus in the analytic framework, as both the social location and the cultural output of the margin vis-à-vis the center are invoked. A marked shift in focus, however, is obvious. At the beginning, under the influence of vintage liberation, the material matrix emerges as prominently as the discursive production, if not more so. Gradually, with the turn to postcolonial theory, the discursive production becomes the main focus of attention. In the process, a highly anticipated alliance between liberation and postcolonialism yields to a severe attack on the former by the latter. Without question, further theorization is imperative as well.

A last driving element of the journey is its pronounced religious-theological character, which moves from a mostly Christian context at first, with an opening toward multifaith hermeneutics on the part of Asian Christian critics, to a decidedly interreligious context later on, with a call for multifaith hermeneutics on the part of all critics, at all levels of criticism. Both poles are justified on religious-theological grounds: (1) abandonment of Christian claims to uniqueness and universality; and (2) joint commitment to mutual enlightenment and enrichment. However, such positions and justifications, indeed even the move itself, call for a more radical exposition of underlying religious-theological visions and ideologies from within postcolonial biblical criticism itself: What happens to God? What happens to scripture? What happens to religious and ecclesial formations? The need for greater theorization here is pressing here too.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study of Sugirtharajah's marginal voice shows how pivotal the figure and work of R.S. Sugirtharajah has been and continues to be for postcolonial biblical criticism, both in terms of achievements secured and questions pending. His journey might thus be seen as a journey for the approach itself. With regard to the journey as such, I have, needless to say, but scratched the surface. In terms of Sugirtharajah himself, the following topics demand closer critical engagement: configuration of postcolonial criticism; relationship to postcolonial theory; and relationship to liberation hermeneutics—all properly pursued within the threefold journey outlined. In terms of postcolonial criticism, the above-mentioned ambiguities, and others besides, demand greater critical unpacking as well. The journey has by no means, therefore, reached its end, nor will it do so any time soon—either on a personal or a critical basis, either for Sugirtharajah or for all who lay claim, in some measure, to the task of postcolonial biblical criticism.

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TEACHING SUGIRTHARAJAH: A FIELD REPORT FROM LOS ANGELES

Daniel L. Smith-Christopher

I am delighted to participate in this volume of essays gathered to honor the critically important contributions being made to biblical studies by our friend, Professor R.S. Sugirtharajah. So much of my own recent work has been conducted in dialogue with many of Sugi's provocative ideas that it would have been difficult for me to choose just a focused study for this collection. However, since most of us are in the business of education, I decided to summarize my observations gathered from an educational experiment that I was fortunate to be able to try at my university, Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, during the fall semester of 2007: a seminar course focused on the writings of R.S. Sugirtharajah for senior (i.e. fourth year) theological studies majors.

As has often been the case with major conversations in theological studies generally and biblical studies more specifically, there can be a significant gap between the level of discussion being conducted in published works, academic papers, and conferences on the one hand, and our classrooms as professional educators on the other hand. My recent involvement in the writing of an Old Testament textbook for Catholic high school religious education courses (Smith-Christopher 2007) was for me a somewhat rude awakening to this gap in my own life. If I honestly believe that the work that I am doing under the general rubrics of postcolonial analysis is much more than merely an entertaining approach to biblical studies, and if I honestly believe that it has moral as well as intellectual urgency—for me, frankly, the two most important requirements for a serious dialogue in biblical studies—then reflecting on the ways in which postcolonial analysis can be taught and how it actually interrogates *how* I teach are central questions. A discussion of the issues raised by attempting to teach the works of R.S. Sugirtharajah on the undergraduate level is therefore hardly of peripheral importance to the tasks we are engaged in as not only Sugi's colleagues and friends but also biblical scholars.

In the case of the seminar I offered in Los Angeles, it was a particularly opportune time to offer such a course focused on the writings of Sugirtharajah, because it ended up being nicely timed to coordinate a visit to the class

by Sugi himself, as he was en route to the annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature meetings—only three hours away by car in San Diego that year.

Context in Los Angeles

Because of the fact that a significant amount of intellectual effort has been expended by Sugirtharajah, among many others, on establishing the importance of context for theological studies, allow me to establish the geographical and institutional context for this interesting experiment. The Theological Studies Department at Loyola Marymount University has seen significant growth in the twenty years that I have been privileged to teach here. Not only has the full-time faculty in the department expanded from eight when I was hired in 1989 to our present twenty-two, but we also have now a very active graduate program at the Masters level and a growing number of undergraduate majors. Most of our undergraduates who major in theological studies are Roman Catholic, of course, but certainly not exclusively. One of the great joys of teaching in a city like Los Angeles is that there is great diversity in our university's student body. This is certainly a reflection of our location in one of the most diverse cities in the world. I routinely have Armenian, Arab, Jewish (and many Persian Jewish), Persian, African American, Asian and Asian American (Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Thai, and Indonesian among the most numerous), and Hispanic students in each of my courses in Old Testament studies.

This raises one of the first questions that teaching in Los Angeles raises about the work of Sugirtharajah. If nothing else, Sugirtharajah's work has established the critical importance of cross-cultural and multi-cultural perspectives in the hermeneutical task. This certainly suggests that we undergraduate teachers ought to be seriously encouraging students from many different cultural backgrounds to take seriously the possibility of graduate work and future teaching in theological studies and biblical studies specifically. However, the pressure on students from various backgrounds to study 'productive' subjects creates an interesting dynamics for those of us who teach in theological studies. At precisely the time when we believe that it is critical to invite many more students to the table, parents are rarely sympathetic or supportive. The dilemma is clear. More often than not, the most interesting students from a variety of cultural backgrounds are those who were first introduced to the Bible in more conservative theological traditions, where the religious significance of 'Scripture Study' overcame the otherwise common dismissal of biblical studies as a viable or important subject. They are then introduced and led by *us* to a *critical* perspective to the Bible that would facilitate the kind of analysis that eventually opens up questions from a postcolonial perspective. Sugirtharajah is

himself clearly a bit cynical when it comes to the possibilities of the historical-critical methods in the present circumstances. In the undergraduate context, however, I would argue that the historical-critical methods are still a necessary prelude to raising questions from feminist, sociological, and postcolonialist perspectives. A continued debate on postcolonialism and undergraduate teaching would be important, I believe, on whether postcolonial questions can be adequately addressed in the absence of at least some kind of preliminary acquaintance with the questions raised by historical-critical analysis of scripture.

At my university, among the more important courses for students majoring in theological studies is one entitled 'Major Christian Thinker'. The bulletin description of this course is fairly routine (and written, clearly, by my numerous colleagues in Systematics!): 'An examination of the theological work of one major thinker, studying the work both as an integrated theological statement and as part of continuing theological dialogue'. However, as the Quaker among the faculty of this Jesuit institution, I am allowed a certain welcome freedom in my selection of 'Major Christian Thinkers'. In addition, with twenty-one colleagues each taking their turn, I will not often have opportunity to do much damage in any case. Last time around for me, over ten years ago now, was a course on my former teacher and mentor, John Howard Yoder. This time, it was Sugi.

Allow me to summarize my approach. I described the course as follows, with an eye to 'selling' it to potential students, of course. Thus I risk embarrassing Sugi with this following description (the contents of which, however, I am prepared to defend):

This course will focus on the Biblical Studies works of Professor R.S. Sugirtharajah, arguably one of the most important and 'cutting edge' scholars working in contemporary Biblical analysis. Himself a New Testament scholar, Sugirtharajah has written a series of provocative and challenging books that suggest new critical questions and methodologies for studying the Bible in the context of modern social and political realities.

These days, as in many of the institutions in the United States and Canada, the required work on 'assessment' requires that we clearly establish 'Student Learning Outcomes'. My suggested list, which I am simply lifting from my syllabus, was as follows:

Student Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- (1) Learn about contemporary social issues in relation to Biblical Studies
- (2) Learn about 'Postcolonialism' as a modern social philosophy

- (3) Learn about 'Postcolonial Biblical Analysis' and how it relates to each of our approaches to Biblical analysis
- (4) Appreciate the work of R.S. Sugirtharajah as an example of contemporary Biblical analysis.

I required and recommended the following books for this course, and a great deal of the discussion in class was oriented around the required readings as we worked through each of the required texts:

- (1) Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory* (1998)
- (2) R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* (2003)
- (3) R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical interpretation* (2002)
- (4) R.S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Empire* (2005)
- (5) R.S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World* (2001)

Strongly Recommended as background reading:

- (6) Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (reprint, 2005)
- (7) Albert Memmi, *Decolonization and the Decolonized* (2006)
- (8) Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Reprint, 1991)

In retrospect, I probably should have included *Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Sugirtharajah 1999) but Sugirtharajah did cover some of the ground from this volume in his more recent material.¹ All of the students were prepared for my requirement of a major research paper, the subject of which would be chosen by the students and, hopefully, arise from our discussions. In other words, I did not assign a specific topic or theme for the research paper, preferring ideas to arise as we were discussing the readings in class. However, about one-third of the way through the class, I began to solicit ideas from each of the students, giving them the strong impression that I was expecting them to crystallize an idea and get started on their research. What I certainly did require is that they clearly and explicitly indicate how their chosen subject matter or theme is in dialogue with Sugirtharajah's work and methodology. It was important to spend that first third of the course introducing students to Sugirtharajah's methodology and the general concept of postcolonialism before they could begin to think about their research projects responsibly.

This, I must say, was one of the strengths of this seminar, and the reason why it may be important to talk about teaching Sugirtharajah's work in the context of this *Festschrift*. There is a strikingly wide-ranging number of

1. While grateful for the legacy of academic publishing like Sheffield Academic Press or E.J. Brill, it is difficult to keep one's composure and assign my undergraduates a large number of books to purchase *and* have the temerity to ask them to pay upwards of a hundred dollars for one of them!

issues and themes among Sugirtharajah's own interests, and the wide-ranging nature of his work means that his books, in general, inspire (sometimes quite unexpected) creativity among undergraduate theology students who are used to biblical studies classes that consist largely of ancient history and textual analysis. I was quite gratified that Sugi's variety of research and analytical subjects inspired great creativity in my students!

Allow me to summarize some of these student papers. In each case, I will identify at least one or two aspects of these students' own social or cultural context for a better appreciation of not only their chosen subject but also the context of the seminar as well.

Summary of Student Research Projects

One student, a European American, chose to work on the Kairos Document of South Africa as a text worthy of a postcolonial analysis. She concludes:

I believe that R.S. Sugirtharajah would see the Kairos Document as a strong example of doing theology and Biblical interpretation under a colonial power. The writers clearly took their situation and did both resistant and liberationist readings of the Bible in an attempt to criticize the colonial government and its injustices. This document is not only a good example of the fight against the colonizer, but also an excellent example of a liberation theology text.

Another European American Roman Catholic student with a strong personal commitment to the Catholic tradition of Marian spirituality nevertheless risked a postcolonial approach to the appearances of Mary in Medjugorje. I say 'risked' because some of our students are a bit hesitant to pursue a line of thought that critically examines pietistic traditions in the Catholic (or Protestant) tradition that has been a part of their own upbringing—and a part of their educational and religious context—for their entire lives. I should clarify that I do not consider it my business to advance a hypercritical perspective on such matters; I choose to be respectful of others religious traditions as I ask for respect of my own. Nevertheless, the postcolonial methodology that she had learned from reading Sugirtharajah called on her to 'read' the appearances in the wider context of historical conflicts and religious violence. She concludes her paper observing that:

Despite the history of the parish and its battle wounds most of the world believes the stereotype that Medjugorje is a Catholic loving city. The rumors and folklore about Medjugorje make it out to be a place where Mary was embraced after her first visit and the children were made celebrities. The actual truth is very different. Through a postcolonial analysis the apparitions in Medjugorje are not as simplistic as a Mary and child iconic painting. Postcolonial theory has given light to the context in which the visions have been and are currently still occurring. The context includes political turmoil, suppressed voices, conversion battles, and ethnic cleansing.

Another European American student with a keen interest in modern China used Sugirtharajah's methodology to posit Occidentalism in China as a counter-rhetoric to Orientalism through Sugirtharajah's use of Said and *Orientalism* (1978). She chose to focus especially on a television series in modern China about the West. The series were originally broadcast in China in 1988, entitled *He Shang*. This six-part television series advocate a much more open attitude to the West and was immediately controversial in different classes of modern Chinese society—and for different reasons. This student concludes her interesting paper with the following observation:

A deeper understanding of *He Shang*'s significance and influential qualities is gained through looking at its historical, political, socioeconomic, and cultural context. The complex hybridity of Orientalistic influence combined with two opposing Occidentalist views of the West create a dynamic yearning within Chinese culture to embrace Western ideals while still maintaining a Chinese identity.

Many of the students drew on their own sub-cultural or minority identity and experience. For example, a Chamorro student from Guam chose an especially interesting episode from World War Two in Guam. During the war, there was an American soldier kept alive by Chamorro villagers for thirty-two months, despite the presence of nineteen thousand occupying Japanese soldiers on the island. What particularly intrigued this student was the symbolic meaning of the story, which is often retold for building up the relations between Guam and the United States. He was able to 'interrogate' this use of the story and its implication of promoting an almost subservient loyalty to the United States. He even contrasted this with stories that appear to him to serve a similar function in other cultural contexts.

Other students also drew on their own personal traditions and cultural experiences. A Mexican American student decided to interview other Mexican American students who have more recent connections to Mexico than he had, and then compare their experiences with his own. A Vietnamese student reflected on her own community in 'Little Saigon' south of Los Angeles and the role of Christianity as she perceives it through an engagement with Sugirtharajah's notions of dialogue. Another Mexican American student reflected on the impact of the NAFTA agreements for cross-border economic development. Finally, an African American student continued her interest in using African traditional religion to understand both historical and contemporary African religious experience, and concluded her study with these words:

All in all, a critical understanding that the hazards of elitist historical sources, worldviews, and perspectives have on people of African descent is an essential goal of postcolonialism. With the help of R.S. Sugirtharajah's brilliant theory about literature of the oppressed subject, in addition to several other authors used, a critical postcolonial evaluation of early

literature about African traditional religion was examined. Elitist literature has shaped the negative perception of African traditional religion that persists in the colonial aftermath at the expense of Western biases.

Another of the European American students in the course chose a specific focus on a biblical passage: Philip's discussion with the Ethiopian Eunuch as described in Acts 8. Notably, his was the only paper that built upon the examination of a particular biblical text. This may raise some interesting questions about whether students understood Sugirtharajah's work to be largely a branch of biblical studies, theology, or historical theology. Such separations, of course, are matters of some controversy in the academy, but it is interesting to note that—without any strong encouragement from me one way or another—only one paper chose to work on a specific text from the Bible.

The other projects included a focused study of William John Colenso, the subject of many of Sugirtharajah's essays; an extended review of Said's work on Orientalism; and a study of some of the episodes of contacts between Jesuits and Native Americans as described in the famous work, *The Jesuit Relations* (2000).² Finally, a Mexican American student with a keen interest in liberation theology chose to work on the Virgin of Guadalupe and the appearances of the 'Talking Cross' in Chiapas Mexican colonial history. She concluded a very interesting study as follows:

The use of Tonantzin and the Talking Cross are two interesting cases which focus on the recovery of culture, tradition, and faith. Sugirtharajah would see these particular cases as a reclaiming of one's culture. In his book *The Bible and the Third World*, Sugirtharajah claims that central to the task of indigenization of biblical interpretation is 'recovery, reoccupation, and reinscription of one's culture which has been degraded and effaced from the colonial narratives and from mainstream biblical scholarship (Sugirtharajah 2001: 177). The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the symbol of the Talking Cross are the same things Sugirtharajah is writing of, when he speaks of this recovery, reoccupation, and reinscription... [t]hese two examples genuinely show the recalling and retelling of peoples past and the power it contains not only for a people, but a nation, a religion, and an identity. The power does not come from the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe or the Talking Cross, but the faith and remembrance of a person's past that the image conveys.

Needless to say, I was quite pleased with the variety of subjects and the creativity in the papers. It is important, however, to reflect on this experiment and what it might mean for future attempts to teach postcolonial approaches

2. This is a massive series of memoirs from Jesuit fathers who were involved in 'first contact' as agents of the Vatican in the 'New World'. These memoirs were written in the seventeenth century and sent to their superiors in France. However, they have only recently begun to be mined for the riches that they contain for postcolonial analysis.

to biblical studies on the undergraduate level. Undergraduate teaching presents, of course, a unique set of challenges quite different from teaching Sugirtharajah on a graduate level.

Reflections on the Course

As noted, the very nature of Sugirtharajah's approach was inviting for students. His work invited them to subject any number of interesting cultural phenomena to a postcolonial analysis. I was impressed that virtually all of these students needed little prodding from me to determine a subject. Not all of the projects were of equal creativity, of course, but there was a general sense that the kinds of questions they were learning to ask lent themselves to a wide variety of subject matters. It was particularly impressive, of course, when students risked a critical examination of aspects of their own religious traditions. The perception that postcolonial analysis is hypercritical and hence a destructive interrogation is such a significant dynamic for students in a religiously-based university that I had to spend some time assuring my students that postcolonial questions have great significance for those of us who continue to practice and treasure a personal religious commitment.

Related to this issue, the most significant problem I faced—largely to be attributed to my own limited reading of introductory texts to the general area of postcolonialist analysis outside its application in biblical studies—was the difficulty in finding and providing readings that introduce postcolonialism more generally. While I personally like Leela Gandhi's work (1998), on reflection it was not a good choice for our undergraduates. Gandhi's text uses too many of the 'inside vocabulary' of postmodernism and cultural analysis to be useful as a text in my context, which is not only undergraduate but also theological. Perhaps Gandhi's text would be more useful in an undergraduate context where postcolonialism is the central subject and not applied to another field like biblical studies, as biblical studies as a field is already filled with its own set of jargons. Again, let me repeat that my own view of Gandhi's text is quite positive, but many of us are used to the fact that many excellent written works may not lend themselves to the undergraduate curriculum easily. If other colleagues seek to teach a similar seminar, I would value hearing from them about suggested alternatives. In fact, I have taught and used Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (2005) in other courses, but only *recommended* Fanon's and Memmi's work for this seminar on Sugirtharajah's work. Rather than relying on another scholar's introductory summaries, spending a few weeks working on primary readings of these two seminal authors in postcolonial theory might have been a stronger approach. If I have another opportunity to teach a course with a major component of Sugirtharajah's work, I think I will work with Fanon and Memmi as required texts.

Furthermore, I should clearly state that almost all of these students had already had my 'Introduction to Old Testament', one of a series of first- and second-year survey courses that fulfill one of the two 'religion requirements' at this university. Therefore, nearly all of the students were familiar with the general aspects of critical biblical scholarship, and were quickly able to place postcolonial analysis within the wider context of biblical criticisms. If I had a class of students with no background in biblical studies whatsoever, I suspect that this seminar would not have been nearly as successful. At least we would have had to incorporate a number of weeks to talk and think about the historical-critical methods more widely before we could focus on the 'new questions' raised by postcolonial biblical criticism. As I mentioned earlier, this raises an interesting procedural dilemma for teachers of Sugirtharajah's work. How much time does one need to spend introducing students to concepts that are then questioned by the author and the course itself?! On many occasions, Sugirtharajah has despaired of the current state of scripture study, suggesting that certain aspects of the historical-critical methods appear to have run their course. Or, more seriously, Sugirtharajah seems to be of the opinion that the historical-critical methods have continued to be conducted in virtual disengagement from the socio-economic and political questions raised by postcolonial analysis. On the other hand, I have found that an introduction to the historical-critical methods is essential—in fact, a required 'step'—in the process of learning how to approach and interpret the Bible critically.

Undergraduates and Reading Sugirtharajah

Of the major works that we surveyed, students found *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* (2003) the most difficult and dense text to read. I suspect that this work shows signs that it is directed toward academics in biblical studies. While I find it a thoroughly enjoyable read, my students found it challenging; that is, beyond the helpful opening chapter that summarizes the tasks that Sugirtharajah hopes to address in the chapters that follow. Discussions in class, particularly when I was able to place many of the chapters in a wider methodological context within biblical and historical studies, helped to open this work for wider discussion. Questions my students raised about some of the examples in *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* are questions common to cultural theory more widely: they found it difficult to understand why a particular example or case is significant (e.g. Sugi's arguments about popular authors commenting on books of the Bible published by Canongate). This is one of the most interesting aspects of cultural theory, of course, as it draws attention to the symbolic nature of events, practices, or artifacts that otherwise 'blend in' to daily life—and the fact of this 'blending' is itself an important part of the analysis!—and thus defining the normal. Sugirtharajah's adoption of this methodology of cultural studies

is part of the challenge, and frankly the delight, of his general approach to postcolonial analysis.

When effectively grasped, however, students began to develop a critical eye for all kinds of things. In order to illustrate this notion that ‘things are more than they appear to be’—I think of the ubiquitous words on automobile rear-view mirrors, ‘Objects are larger than they appear’—I took an entire class session very early on in the semester and quizzed the students about Freddy Mercury, the late lead singer of the famous rock band Queen. I played the hilarious video from the song: ‘I Want to Break Free’ (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hMrY8jysdg>) and then asked questions about what they knew about Freddy Mercury. (The first response I got was, ‘You mean, *besides* the fact that he was awesome?’). It helped, of course, that I had just seen a documentary about Mercury’s life and discovered all kinds of interesting things: his fascinating background in India (raised as a Parsi or Zoroastrian); being a gay man but terribly worried about his sexual orientation being known during his earlier career; a member of a significant minority in Britain (the Indian and Pakistani communities with their various subcultures); and, finally, he chose the genre of Rock and Roll music to express his talents despite his abilities in other genres of music. Each of these elements, as they came out, lent a new depth to students’ sense of who Mercury was. More important, their knowledge about Mercury’s life raised interesting questions for my students about his ‘meaning’ as a cultural icon. The point here is to choose a ‘known artifact’ of contemporary life that is relevant to my students, and then push them to ‘interrogate’ elements of that artifact that may not be immediately obvious. One thing was obvious: there was more to Freddy Mercury than met the eye! The fact that he was an immigrant to Britain lent itself even more effectively to postcolonial analysis. If students can see more examples of how postcolonial interrogation is applicable to various arenas of life, they also become clearer about the unique set of questions that is being posited by this form of analysis. Sugirtharajah’s move to apply this to biblical studies, then, becomes all the more intelligible—and impressive.

In contrast to having to work carefully and struggle with *Postcolonial Reconfigurations*, my students frequently referred back to *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (2002) even more than they referred back to the companion volume, *The Bible and the Third World* (2001). Of Sugirtharajah’s work, *The Bible and Empire* (2005) was the most recent that we considered. Each of the essays in this most recent work presents ‘case studies’ of how the Bible and biblical interpretation play a role in the context of certain colonial situations. My undergraduates found the beginning essay (2005: ch. 1) that compares Thomas Jefferson’s scissors-and-paste Bible with the commentary by Raja Rammahun Roy (as both came out in 1820) particularly intriguing, partly because the article deals with the realities of

the United States. They certainly found Sugi's reflections on the English anguish in response to the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and the concomitant use of the Bible (2005: ch. 2) to be challenging in a post 9/11 context. Chapter 3, however, was a particular favorite because John Colenso emerged as a popular figure and the subject of other essays in Sugi's other work. As I indicated, one student decided to focus her term paper on Colenso.

As I have already indicated, my students found *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* most useful, and it is not too difficult to figure out why. While *The Bible and Empire* presents various examples of how the Bible is 'implicated' in colonial relations, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* is arguably more systematic—and undergraduates always seem to appreciate this. In this work, Sugirtharajah provides a very accessible introduction to postcolonial criticism (2002: ch. 1) as well as an interesting and helpful matrix for analysis (2002: ch. 2). Students found the notions of 'dissident', 'resistant', 'heritagist', 'nationalistic', 'liberationist', and 'dissentient' readings to be a useful matrix for thinking about their own projects. I would now suggest that *The Bible and the Third World*—despite its publication a year earlier—be read after *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*. Of course, this raises an interesting and important pedagogical question: is it more effective pedagogically to provide first a methodological overview and then illustrations of this overview, or is it better to give examples before a systemization? This involves, of course, the debate of deductive and inductive reasoning in teaching and learning. The latter would seem to be Sugi's presumed plan, given the dates of the two publications in question. Of course, as most professors well know, it is not always helpful to read the works of single important thinker in chronological order, unless you are intending to do a kind of biographically driven approach. This, however, tends to focus on the life of the author rather than on the significance of the thought.

This does raise another interesting question in the context of 'Teaching Sugirtharajah'. As teachers, we do not yet have access to a detailed biography of Sugirtharajah himself. Knowing Sugi as I do, I was able to supply a few pieces of important background information, such as his involvement in Tamil writing and publishing, as well as his teaching context in England. While most of us would be quite embarrassed about writing some kind of extended autobiography, I wonder if there is not an increasing importance and need for just this kind of text in the context of teaching and reading an important author. After all, I think most of us would consider it a treasure trove to read autobiographical comments written by Wellhausen, Eichrodt, or Eissfeldt! They worked, of course, in an era when such biographical information was considered quite 'beside the point', but one point of the postcolonial move is to insist on precisely the importance of such information! Thus, I would assign my friend Sugi an important task: write and

reflect on how your own biography is related to your subject of analysis! The rest of us will still subject your words to analysis, but it would be helpful nonetheless—and we often do not consider the usefulness of such things until we find ourselves teaching our friend's work. Along these lines, the recent published 'interview' with Sugirtharajah (Premnath 2007) is certainly a model that needs to be encouraged in further work in biblical studies in general and postcolonial analysis in particular.

Dialogue with Liberation Theology in a Roman Catholic Context

Not surprisingly for senior theology students at a Roman Catholic institution, Sugi's dialogue with and challenges of liberation theology (especially 2002: Chap. 4) was particularly controversial. In institutions like ours, liberation theology tends to provide the language of dissent and politically progressive theological discussion. At least this is true in discussions between students and faculty, since I do not know how students talk amongst themselves. There are a number of courses in our curriculum—some taught by our more senior faculty as well as younger faculty—that feature discussions of liberation theology.

Particularly interesting in this Roman Catholic context was Sugi's critique that liberation theology's strong Christian orientation creates problems when liberation theology attempts to articulate a multi-faith perspective (and I agree with Sugi when he observes that this kind of multi-faith articulation does not happen very often in the classical texts of liberation theology). Sugi is particularly critical of what he called 'incessant Biblicism'; by this, I take him to mean that liberation theologians maintain such a strong or even assertive Christian foundation for their liberation work that it sometimes makes multi-faith work difficult (Sugirtharajah 2002: 112-16).

The problem is not that people speak from a tradition. This is hardly the substance of Sugi's criticism. Rather, by speaking of 'incessant Biblicism', there is a religious and ideological commitment to a superior religious tradition that relegates and makes relative all attempts at inter-faith dialogue. This may partly be a product of liberation theology's birth in the Latin American context where (until very recently) there were few major populations of non-Christians (other than indigenous peoples who usually maintain some form of dual involvement in traditional rituals combined with their Catholic piety and involvement). Interestingly, our department maintains a strong multi-faith element as well, with no less than two professors with strong backgrounds in South Asian religious traditions, a professor of Islam, and a priest who is an internationally recognized specialist in Buddhist studies. Liberation theology is thus not typically seen in our school as an impediment to their multi-faith interests, in spite or because of its clear tradition as a very consciously Roman Catholic university. With the exception of what may be classified as 'old

school' labor Catholicism and its often troubled dialogue with Marxism—as exemplified in the Worker Priests, the Catholic Worker, and midwest union support so indicative of traditional working-class Catholic urban neighborhoods to this day—it is still true, I think, that liberation theology provides most of the conceptual vocabulary for progressive thought in contemporary Catholicism.

I would not be honest, however, if I did not state that I personally have some difficulty with Sugi's thought on this matter. I have for some time believed that a clear and strong affiliation with one's own religious tradition does not necessarily or inevitably imply an unwillingness to see shortcomings and mistakes in one's own traditions or preclude the ability to appreciate, learn from, and work with those whose religious commitments are equally strong in other traditions. Indeed, I would go further and suggest that I have serious concerns about the assumption that we must all sit much more lightly within our own traditions for progressive socio-political cooperation among religious traditions to take place for the good of humanity. For example, I am honest enough, I hope, to acknowledge as a Christian in the Quaker tradition that what I find most moving and instructive in other religious traditions is precisely their own tradition—sometimes minority views within their traditions—of justice, nonviolence, and participatory decision making. In short, that which I also value in my own tradition. For many, this may not be an example of true tolerance; I should, instead, be open to the different as well as the similar. On some level, I hope that I am, particularly when an idea or practice is entirely new or different to me. However, I fail to see why I should 'appreciate' violent texts, violent actions, and intolerant attitudes in other religious traditions when I have tried to reject them so totally in my own Christian tradition. Yet I have often found in multi-faith dialogue that the atmosphere turns from general warmth when I express my own commitments to nonviolence to a distinct chill when I question the 'just wars' or supposedly 'necessary violence' of another tradition! It reminds me of the old arguments between left-wing activists and Quakers during the cold war, when some of our Marxist allies in the anti-war movement tried to argue that Soviet bombs were somehow more righteous than capitalist bombs. Marxist 'just wars', however, had the same flaws as the more Augustinian variety, however secularized that tradition might have become in the West. That, however, is another argument for another time.

Closer to 'home' in terms of cultural and postcolonial debates, another good example that comes to mind draws from my keen interest in Native American culture and tradition. Despite these interests which I share with many fellow Quakers both in the past and at present, I have always been quite uncomfortable with the 'cult of the Warrior' in Native traditions—especially in the Plains nations—which today translates into a very strong Native communal affirmation of Native American soldiers in the United

States military, including, for instance, a nearly religious devotion to and use of the American flag. Is it any wonder, then, that I am drawn instead to the Peace Chief tradition of the Cheyenne, where individuals who took an oath of nonviolence often had to stand against their own fellow tribesmen who took no such oath and became soldiers? Naturally, I am also drawn to those Hopi who declared themselves 'conscientious objectors' during times of war (including World War Two). Such 'picking and choosing' from the traditions of the 'other' raises interesting questions in the postcolonial context, I realize. But we hardly do any different when we try to articulate a different position from within our own 'tradition', say, when we speak as a person from the dominant European cultures but try to identify the critical, minority, and marginalized voices from within that tradition. For example, we do the same when we quite understandably express our deep appreciation for the legacy of Bartolomey de las Casas in the sixteenth century furiously criticizing the mistreatment of indigenous peoples in so-called New World territories being conquered by the Spanish.

All of this relates directly to one of Sugi's larger concerns; namely, the interaction between developing nations and missionary enterprises from Europe and the United States. How, and in what form, can or may one conduct a *legitimate* form of missionary work? This is an interesting question that I would like to take up in a future discussion in the postcolonial context, as it arises quite clearly in a religiously committed institutional context such as my own.

In sum, Sugi's commitment to a multi-faith emphasis within postcolonialism is an interesting and important challenge to the occasional discomfort noted in liberationist discussions, where the multi-faith element is not necessarily a major theme. However, there is more to be worked out on this issue, which becomes particularly sensitive when Sugi's work is being taught in the context of a faith-based educational setting.

The concluding chapters of *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* also raise important questions about Bible translations, and how translations themselves can be impacted by the socio-political contexts of western and 'Christian' missionary-sending countries—and thus the translation-sponsoring societies (2002: chs 5-6). In my view, a deep appreciation of these issues would require a graduate seminar in biblical studies where comparative translations of Old and New Testament texts from Hebrew and Greek into contemporary languages could be examined in some detail. This is not to deny or dispute the fact that Sugirtharajah's general concern around Bible translation has been clearly expressed in these chapters, and undergraduates (especially given the multi-linguistic contexts of modern American universities) are able to appreciate the idea. A deeper discussion of this issue may also draw on Richard Horsley's work on empire, both historical and contemporary (e.g. 2004; 2008).

Concluding Comments

In concluding this 'field report' on 'Teaching Sugi' in an undergraduate context within the United States, let me state that senior level theology students with sufficient biblical studies background are quite capable of dealing with this material in a serious and creative manner. This is not the patently obvious or merely banal conclusion that says, 'Everyone is teachable'. I think all professors have experienced the frustration of trying to teach literature that meant a great deal to our own thought and development—either in graduate work or long after completing one's own degree work—but finding the task quite difficult indeed. This is usually because we underestimate the amount of background that is required by students to appreciate creatively and responsibly the importance of the work in question. I am pleased to report, therefore, that most of Sugi's work is accessible on the undergraduate level, especially if students have sufficient background in biblical studies and thus understandings of historical and critical methodologies.

I would also conclude that pedagogical discussions are critical to the wider task that we face in practicing postcolonial biblical criticism. If we are to take the teaching of established theorists like Sugirtharajah into classroom discussions, we will also need to talk and think about the task of writing effective introductory textbooks so postcolonial issues and concerns may be approached from the start, even or especially in beginning or basic undergraduate courses.

The discussion that needs to take place, hopefully in continued dialogue with Sugirtharajah, is how postcolonial analysis raises critical questions about actual classroom practice and pedagogical methods. I hope this essay, written in honor of my friend and colleague R.S. Sugirtharajah, can help give this issue higher priority on our collective agenda.

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WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES
POSTCOLONIAL BIBLICAL CRITICISM MAKE?
REFLECTIONS FROM A (SOUTH) AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE*

Gerald O. West

More than ten years ago I asked the question: Does postcolonial biblical interpretation have a place in South African context, and if so, what place (1997)? I asked this question at the 1996 Old Testament Society of South Africa Congress against the background of an emerging cottage industry in postcolonial studies in general and postcolonial biblical interpretation in particular. I noted then that the geo-political emergence of postcolonialism, unlike its other biblical critical cousins, was 'located primarily in Southern/Third World contexts or among their diasporal exiles and emigres who live in the North' (1997: 322). 'But, no doubt', I went on to add, somewhat prophetically, 'post-colonial [with the hyphen, then] discourse within Biblical studies will make the shift from East to West and from South to North, as it has done in literary studies, altering its forms as it moves from projects which struggle to change the world to programmes which re-describe the world (see also Goss 1996)' (G. West 1997: 322).

Postcolonial biblical studies is now, ten years later, an industrial enterprise. And the centre of gravity has moved from East to West and from South to North, and the focus from actual struggles to theoretical re-description. Not that theoretical re-description is not important. Cornel West, the African American theologian, philosopher, and activist reminds us of the emancipatory potential of modes of discourse which destabilize the dominant vocabularies (C. West 1985: 270-71), and this is precisely one of the significant contributions of postcolonial discourse.

But the question remains, what is the usefulness of postcolonial biblical interpretation in our South African context, and why has (South) African biblical scholarship shown so little interest in postcolonial *discourse*? Given what (South) African biblical scholarship has been up to already, what difference does postcolonial biblical criticism make? The question is made even more relevant because of regional developments in Southern African biblical

* This essay is a revision of an article published in the journal *Neotestamentica*; I am grateful to the editor for the permission to rework it and publish it here (G. West 2008).

scholarship within the last ten years. The first and most significant of these developments is the return of Musa Dube to Botswana in the mid-1990s, having spent a number of years living and studying in the United States. She returned home with considerable expertise and a profile in postcolonial studies and the then emerging field of biblical postcolonial criticism. She brought with her a comprehensive knowledge of the emergent field and a prolific propensity to publish work in this field (e.g. Dube 1996a; 1996b; 1997). We in the Southern African region were, therefore, kept fairly thoroughly appraised of the emergence and development of this discourse and its potential for our contexts. However, not even Dube's considerable creative energies in the field of postcolonial biblical studies prompted (South) African biblical scholarship to cast more than a cursory glance at this potential hermeneutical framework.¹ But that has begun to change.

The second development in the last ten years has been the substantial contribution of a South African biblical scholar, Jeremy Punt. In April of 2002 he presented a paper at the New Testament Society of South Africa conference on what was published as 'Postcolonial Biblical Criticism in South Africa: Some Mind and Road Mapping' (Punt 2003). His particular contribution was to survey and help us navigate the emergent field of postcolonial *biblical* criticism. While the focus of my initial offering had been on South African postcolonial literary studies (including such work as Attwell 1993) and postcolonial historical-anthropology (including such work as Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), Punt introduced us to the pioneering work of biblical scholars like R.S. Sugirtharajah, Fernando Segovia, Kwok Pui-lan, Richard Horsley, and of course, Musa Dube. He followed this up a few years later in a closely related article, presented at the 2003 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in the United States, but only published in 2006 (Punt 2006). Noting that there have been 'very few attempts to introduce postcolonial biblical criticism as a credible hermeneutical approach for the subcontinent', he asks, in his provocative title, 'Why Not Postcolonial Biblical Criticism in (South) Africa: Stating the Obvious or Looking for the Impossible?' and then goes on to consider 'possible reasons for the failure of postcolonial criticism to impact upon biblical studies in (South) Africa on a large scale, when it offers such obvious hermeneutical potential, spin-offs, as well as the opportunity to approach the Bible from a different than the traditional vantage point' (Punt 2006: 63).

Punt shows his own hand in this later piece, advocating for the potential value of postcolonial biblical criticism. He is, therefore, somewhat puzzled by the sustained lack of interest in this form of biblical criticism. Besides the work of Dube, there have in the past decade been only passing

1. As a colleague has pointed out, perhaps the reluctance to embrace Dube's work in (Southern) Africa has had more to do with her feminism than her postcolonialism!

references to and partial appropriations of aspects of postcolonial criticism in (South) African biblical scholarship (e.g. van Heerden 2006). More recently, a few African biblical scholars have engaged more fully (e.g. Nzimande 2005; 2008; Kiambi 2008).² While I, like Punt, am puzzled by the reticence of African biblical scholars to embrace postcolonial biblical criticism in (South) African biblical scholarship, I am less convinced of its 'intrinsic' usefulness, and so understand something of our hesitancy. But before I explain myself or pursue both my and Punt's qualified advocacy of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics, there is one more development in the South African biblical scene worth noting.

This third development is the recent article by Frank England, entitled, 'Mapping Postcolonial Biblical Criticism in South Africa' (2004). England's echoing of my and Punt's work in the title is deliberate, for he wants to contribute to our programmatic questions by offering related questions of his own and propose what he considers to be an important resource for the 'mapping' of African biblical scholarship in general and South African postcolonial biblical criticism in particular. In order to probe (South) African biblical scholarship more deeply, he proposes we use Michel Foucault's 'archaeological' analysis of discourse. This form of analysis is appropriate, he argues, to the postcolonial task, which includes 'to question prevailing biblical exegesis and commentary by returning to their sites of emergence at the interface of discourse and material existence' (England 2004: 91). Although he does not go this far, it could be argued that what England is offering through Foucault's archaeology of knowledge (Foucault 1972) is a larger project which would go some way to answering both my and Punt's question: Why not postcolonial biblical criticism in South Africa? The short answer, which Punt puts forward from his own analysis (though not the full scale archaeological 'dig' envisioned by England), is that there are vested institutional, ecclesial, scholastic, economic, and power interests in the status quo of South Africa biblical scholarship (Punt 2006). The short answer, according to England, requires a longer answer, which is the project England proposes, with Foucault as our guide.

But it is not only what England argues that constitutes the third development in the past ten years, it is that he has joined the discussion. Though deeply committed to issues of biblical hermeneutics in South Africa, especially in the struggle against apartheid, England has not made a contribution to this field for nearly twenty years (England 1989). Yet he has clearly been inspired by the potential value of postcolonial biblical criticism; so

2. It is perhaps significant that Makhosazana Nzimande, a South African, did her Ph.D. in the United States and that Julius Kiambi, a Kenyan, did his Masters with me in South Africa. South African biblical scholarship has always had a closer association with Western/Northern forms of biblical scholarship than other African biblical scholarship.

much so that it has drawn him out into the public scholarly realm again to join the debate.

England's contribution also leads me into the next part of my essay through his invocation of Foucault. One of my worries about postcolonial biblical criticism, and one of the reasons I think it has not been taken up more substantially in (South) Africa, is, as Punt also argues, 'the nature of the discourse itself' (Punt 2006: 68). Besides the opacity of the discourse, it has a foreign feel. The reality of particular African postcolonial experiences is felt in bodies '@home',³ and the discourse that now designates postcolonial studies has tended to be forged away-from-home, in the diaspora.

Discourse in the Diaspora

There is a now recurring litany of ancestors of postcolonial studies, invoked as regularly as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; namely, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi Bhabha. Read almost any survey or programmatic work on postcolonial biblical criticism and these three names will be invoked (e.g. Sugirtharajah 2001; 2003; Moore and Segovia 2005; Moore 2006). Part of my concern is that if this is said often enough, we will come to believe it is true that postcolonial studies begins with these intellectuals from the diaspora.

To assert the preeminence of these contributions, and significant contributions they are, is to elide both the particular local struggles of actual communities against forms of colonialism and the longer historical theoretical path that led to current postcolonial theory, a history that includes, argues Roland Boer, the foundational contributions of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin (Boer 2005: 166). Actual political struggles against colonialism are foundational, and yet the centre of gravity of the discourse has shifted from the local to the diasporal. Fortunately, (South) African biblical scholarship is rooted and routed @home, so there is little danger of our diasporal brothers and sisters shifting the fulcrum away from our local realities. There is not yet a critical mass of African biblical scholars working in the West/North; most of us work @home.

With respect to the theoretical lacuna, Boer, an Australian biblical scholar (among other things), has fortunately provided us with a timely reminder of the longer conversation, showing carefully how the holy trinity of Said, Spivak, and Bhabha have not only elided their theoretical precursors, including Marx

3. I use this formulation, using the '@' as marker of place, as a shorthand for the postcolonial realities of actual postcolonial struggles, from within which the analytical categories and concepts of the discourse emerged. It is an echo of a phrase used by R.S. Sugirtharajah, as we will see later, in whose honour I offer this essay as a colleague and friend.

and Lenin's critical engagement with colonialism and imperialism (Boer 2005: 167), but also 'systematically detached various key aspects of Marxist theory from Marxism itself and then negated their political potential' in their constructions of postcolonial theory (Boer 2005: 168). Said did this through his appropriation of Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony via Foucault's work on power (hence a worry about England's unproblematic appropriation of Foucault), Spivak did this through her Derridean, deconstructive approach to Marx (which is partially understandable given her commitment to feminism), and Bhabha did it through his use of 'Lacanian psychoanalysis along with a demarxified Bakhtin' (Boer 2005: 169).

Re-membling postcolonial criticism in a way that elides the contribution of Marxist analysis is a matter of substantial concern. But it becomes even more problematic from a South African perspective when we watch as, for example, Sugirtharajah first coopts Itumeleng Mosala's Black liberation biblical hermeneutics as an example of *postcolonial* biblical hermeneutics (Sugirtharajah 2001: 251-52), and then excludes his contributions on Marxist materialist biblical hermeneutics from a later edition of a book in which they had previously occupied considerable space (compare Sugirtharajah 2006 and Sugirtharajah 1991).

It is enough to make us (South) African biblical scholars suspect conspiracy, particularly when there is a trajectory of work on postcolonialism theory, outside of postcolonial biblical criticism, which continues to incorporate Marxism. With Robert Young we know well that more political forms of postcolonialism have incorporated 'predominantly non-western forms of Marxism... to analyse the system and histories of imperialism and colonialism, their aftermath and their persistence' (Young 2001: 58).

So why the reluctance to grant a place to Marxism in postcolonial biblical studies? David Jobling offers a conciliatory comment, cautioning those of us who would claim an ideological plot, saying that postcolonialism's 'forgetting' of its own Marxist history 'is perhaps not quite the conspiracy' Boer and others of us make it (Jobling 2005: 191). But he immediately goes on to insist, 'to the extent that postcolonialism is hiding (from itself and others) the resources of the Marxist tradition, it is narrowing the ideological options... of people in struggle' (Jobling 2005: 191). Jobling himself goes further, refusing in his own work on postcolonial biblical criticism to subsume the biblical hermeneutics of actual local struggles under the generic label of postcolonialism. In Jobling's own case study, that of the work of the South African Black theologian Takatso Mofokeng, he gives the particulars of Mofokeng's context its own integrity, recognizing that each local struggle must speak with its own voice before it is brought into conversation with postcolonial discourse.

But I believe Boer is on to something in his conspiracy theory, though it is not only Marx who is the victim (Boer 2003). Anything particular and local

is prone to commodification and consumption by postcolonial discourse. Just as Mosala has been commodified and consumed by Sugirtharajah as a postcolonial biblical critic, much more threatens to be commodified and consumed by postcolonialism's voracious appetite to encompass all, theoretically.

The mechanism by which this process of commodification and consumption operates is ably analysed and described by Boer in one of his early essays on postcolonialism (Boer 1998). In this essay he argues that 'postcolonialism is closely tied in with postmodernism', which he acknowledges is not 'an overly original suggestion', though what he goes on to argue is. He characterizes postmodernism in terms of 'a dialectical conjunction between globalization and disintegration' (Boer 1998: 25). Describing postmodernism in these terms enables Boer to make a markedly political connection with postcolonialism, 'since postcolonialism is not so much a subset of postmodernism as constitutive of the postmodern moment in the first place' (Boer 1998: 26). For it is in postcolonialism that 'the intense dialectical opposition of globalization and disintegration shows up most sharply' (Boer 1998: 26). As he goes on to argue, 'each time the forces of decolonization have arisen', including in Africa and Asia in the mid-to late-twentieth century, 'this has become a means for yet more intense colonization', in the form of 'a more powerful mutation in capitalism in their postcolonial phase' (Boer 1998: 27). In other words, postcolonialism 'may be understood as that which arises as part of (while simultaneously becoming definitive of) that phase of capitalism [Fredric] Jameson designates "late capitalism"' (Boer 1998: 27). Global capitalism 'generates its Other', according to Boer's analysis, through the related processes of 'reification' and 'disintegration' (1998: 26). Together reification and disintegration function, on the economic level especially, in a two-step process which disintegrates the colonized context and then reifies its fragments by commodifying them, thus rend(er)ing them suitable for repackaging and consumption by the colonial/imperial centres.

Indeed, Boer argues, the very 'assertion of a national identity is part of the dynamic of globalization itself: the desire to be distinct is generated in response to the inexorable drive to economic and cultural uniformity' (1998: 36). And yet in this very response to globalization, 'at the point where one feels a genuine oppositional move has been made, globalization shows through even more strongly' in the way 'particular ethnic, local and national quirks become the stuff of global fashion and interest—Australian accents and films, Aboriginal art and literature, to name a few more notable examples' (Boer 1998: 36). The disintegration wrought by global late capitalism on neo-colonial contexts produces local fragments which are exoticized and then consumed in their now commodified and de-politicized forms. The 'relentless logic' of global capitalism is that it produces and consumes 'the very particularities of a local situation' (Boer 1998: 37). Bluntly

put, the internal logic of postcolonial biblical interpretation as a form of postmodern global capitalism tends to encourage the generation of local artifacts, by first reifying them as authentic, exotic, native, vernacular, Third World objects, and then packaging them in forms that make them palatable for consumers in the imperial centres.

The way out of this for biblical studies, which is itself determined by similar economic formations, both in the centres of empire and on the postcolonial peripheries (as Punt also recognises [Punt 2006: 68-69]), is according to Boer for biblical studies to participate in the formation of an anticipatory socialist culture. The most 'viable mode of destabilizing, disrupting and finally replacing hegemonic, imperial, biblical scholarship [and its postcolonial relation] is', says Boer,

one that seeks to be part of the construction of a culture that anticipates the end of the capitalist social and economic organization that is part and parcel of such a hegemony. Any seriously seditious postcolonial biblical studies needs to make an acquaintance with socialism, in its areas of Marxist political and economic theory and practice.... For it is here that a truly oppositional discourse may be found (Boer 1998: 46).

I agree with Boer's analysis, both in his diagnosis and the remedy, which is why I worry that the oppositional posture of postcolonial biblical criticism (Sugirtharajah 2006b: 66) is not sufficiently attentive to the structural and systemic dimensions of power, especially at the macro-economic level of global neo-liberal capitalism (viewed always, I would add, from the perspective of particular local contexts). I worry, in other words, that postcolonial biblical hermeneutics has too quickly moved beyond liberation hermeneutics. That postcolonial biblical criticism has done so is, I will argue in the remainder of this essay, why it has not been taken up wholeheartedly in (South) African biblical scholarship, where the legacy of liberation hermeneutics lingers on.⁴ We realize the danger of separating the local struggles we are engaged in—real, actual struggles in particular contexts—from larger emancipatory and transformative projects (such as [African] socialism or [African] feminism).

Hermeneutics @Home

Unfortunately, the leading spokesperson for postcolonial biblical interpretation and one of its pioneers, R.S. Sugirtharajah, has been at the forefront

4. I realise that I am overstating the commitment of African biblical scholarship to liberation hermeneutics, for I recognise that it is inculturation hermeneutics that is the dominant form of discourse in African biblical scholarship (G. West 2005), and that white South African biblical hermeneutics in general has followed the apolitical fashions of Europe and the United States of America rather than the liberation hermeneutics of South African Black Theology and Contextual Theology (G. West 2006: 145-48).

of the campaign (which includes Fernando Segovia, in a more nuanced fashion [Segovia 2000]) to minimize the contribution of liberation hermeneutics. While some of his analysis of biblical liberation hermeneutics is astute, his predominant tendency is to caricature (or misunderstand) its components or to coopt/consume them as elements of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics (Sugirtharajah 2006a: 4-6; 2001: 203-275). This is not useful; and I use the word 'useful' deliberately to emphasise that for some of us biblical scholarship has to be about its usefulness in contexts where the Bible is a potentially significant text for social transformation. Far more useful is the underdeveloped hyphen Sugirtharajah inserts between 'liberation-postcolonial' in his 'Afterword' to the third edition of *Voices from the Margin* (Sugirtharajah 2006c: 495). This hyphen (as many hyphens have come to do) could carry a significant, but yet to be determined, load. African women's biblical scholarship, particularly the work of Dube, I will argue shortly, is beginning to show us what weight this hyphen might bear.

Earlier on, in his 'Introduction' to this volume of essays from the Third World, Sugirtharajah makes a distinction between postcolonial hermeneutics and 'diasporic hermeneutics', saying 'If the 1980s was the time of the subalterns, now is the time of the diasporic intellectuals' (Sugirtharajah 2006a: 5). Implicit in this formulation, coming immediately after his discussion of postcolonial hermeneutics, is that postcolonialism proper is centred about the postcolonial subaltern on the periphery while diasporic hermeneutics is centred around the postcolonial intellectual residing in the colonial centre. I agree, but wonder if Sugirtharajah intends this deconstructive distinction, for surely the three usual suspects, Said, Spivak, and Bhabha, and the scholarly industry they have founded are more aptly described as diasporic than postcolonial?

Sugirtharajah sustains this deconstruction of his own postcolonial edifice in his discussion of the different agendas of diasporic intellectuals and those 'who are physically resident in their respective homelands':

It is clear that these discourses, the one from home and the other from abroad,⁵ are motored and motivated by different agendas. A quick scrutiny of the two discourses will reveal stark differences in their motivation and mission. The key terms for articulations emerging from home might begin with HIV/AIDS, backward classes, base communities, *burakumins*, capitalism, *dalits*, development, environment, free-trade, or the World Trade Organization. The list for the diasporic scenario might begin with alterity, border-thinking, body-politics, carnival, deconstruction, the end of history, mimicry, and so forth. Similarly, these two discourses summon and anchor their work in different families of authors and texts. The theologies at home might include Ambedkar, Banerjea,

5. My '@home' is a deliberate echo of the former.

Chenchiah, Gandhi, Gutiérrez, Garvey, Mbiti, Mosala, Samatha, Song, Kitamori, and Koyama. Diasporic discourse might begin with Althusser, Anzaldúa, Bhaktin, Bhabha, Cabral, Derrida, Said, and Žižek. I may have overstressed the differences. They are, nevertheless, palpable: one is located firmly in the cultural, pastoral, and political milieu of the people and explores the social conditions affecting them, whereas the other is desperately seeking a home and acceptability in the academy, enamoured of and entrapped by its theoretical sophistry and methodological procedures (Sugirtharajah 2006a: 6).

This is remarkable! What is Sugirtharajah up to in this fairly savage deconstruction of ‘diasporic-postcolonialism’? For what he calls ‘diasporic’ hermeneutics now looks and sounds like what is commonly called ‘post-colonial’ hermeneutics, and what might be called ‘@home hermeneutics’ surely looks and sounds like liberation hermeneutics!

However, while I admire this moment of clarity and honesty, I want to agree with Sugirtharajah that there are aspects of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics (in its various configurations) that are distinguishable from liberation hermeneutics and potentially useful for (South) African biblical hermeneutics, *provided* they remain within a broader liberatory hermeneutical framework with its agenda being determined by those who live and work @home.

African women’s biblical scholarship is a case in point, and I choose them as a case study because I concur with Tinyiko Maluleke that African women’s biblical hermeneutics is characterized by ‘freshness, enthusiasm, creativity, and sharpness’ (Maluleke 2001: 238); if there is a site where we will find the kind of productive hyphen invoked by Sugirtharajah in African biblical scholarship, this is it. The work of Dube is an excellent example of a form of postcolonialism which remains rooted in a liberation framework. Dube is an obvious choice to begin with. Not only does Stephen Moore describe her book, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (2000), as ‘[a]rguably, the most impressive monograph to date in postcolonial biblical criticism’ (Moore 2006: 136), she herself uses the postcolonial label for her work (which very few other African women do), and she is fairly clear about her hermeneutic moves, including their broader location within a liberation paradigm.

Many of her hermeneutic moves do have family resemblances with what has been characterized as postcolonial biblical interpretation, though her starting point, often implicit, is more closely akin to liberation hermeneutics. For example, she begins her major work, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, written during a period when she was herself a diasporic intellectual, by setting her study firmly within the struggle for liberation. Her books begins with the following paragraph, rooted in liberation hermeneutics:

During the decades of the armed struggle for liberation in sub-Saharan Africa, an anonymous short story, orally narrated and passed on by word of mouth, became popular. The story held that ‘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’. The story summarizes the sub-Saharan African experience of colonization. It explains how colonization was connected to the coming of the white man, how it was connected to his use of the Bible, and how the black African possession of the Bible is connected to the white man’s taking of African people’s lands. Admittedly, the story holds that the Bible is now a sub-Saharan book, but it is an inheritance that will always be linked to and remembered for its role in facilitating European imperialism (2000: 3).

The next paragraph continues in the same vein, stating ‘Those of us who grew up professing Christian faith in the age of the armed struggle for liberation, from World War II to South African independence in 1994, were never left to occupy our places comfortably’ (Dube 2000: 3). Among other things, the Christian religion, its practice, practitioners, and institutions were relentlessly interrogated, leading Dube to her programmatic question (shared with generations of African biblical scholars), ‘that is, given the role of the Bible in facilitating imperialism, how should we read the Bible as postcolonial subjects?’ (2000: 4).

I am not disputing that there are elements in Dube’s biblical hermeneutics that go beyond the normal limits of liberation hermeneutics; my point is that postcolonial hermeneutics cannot do the job Dube wants done on its own, and she knows this. There needs to be some form of alliance with liberation hermeneutics, perhaps utilizing Sugirtharajah’s hyphenated ‘liberation-postcolonial’ formulation (Sugirtharajah 2006c: 495).

Put differently, though invoking the term ‘postcolonial’ in her work, is Dube doing anything different from her African feminist sisters who have stayed @home? What in her work makes it ‘postcolonial’? A detailed response to this important question is beyond the scope of this essay; my purpose here is simply to note that Dube always situates her appropriations of postcolonial discourse within the larger paradigm of liberation hermeneutics. In most instances she modifies the term ‘postcolonial’ with the term ‘feminist’ (Dube 1997; 2000), and in others she surrounds it with other traditional liberation language (Dube 2006).

And she is not alone in her liberationist appropriation of postcolonial hermeneutic elements. The only other African women to make a significant appropriation of postcolonial biblical interpretation—and she too, like Dube, received her Ph.D. from the United States—is Makhosazana K. Nzimande. She too qualifies her use of the term ‘postcolonial’; in her case she uses the evocative Zulu term *imbokodo* (‘grinding stone’) to do this, speaking of ‘postcolonial *Imbokodo* biblical interpretation’ (Nzimande 2005; 2008). Her consistent use of the upper case for *Imbokodo* marks her privileging of the local and of the

liberation paradigm. Though the term refers to an actual grinding stone, used to grind grain in traditional African homes, it is pregnant with other connotations. The most powerful of these derive from the freedom song sang during the 1956 Defiance Campaign in South Africa as women marched against the apartheid regime's racist pass laws, singing: '*Wathint' abafazi, wathint' imbokodo, uzokufa*'; that is, 'You strike a woman, you strike a grinding stone; and you will be crushed' (Nzimande 2005: 23-24). Like the grinding stone itself, African women in South Africa are resistant and impervious to even prolonged socio-political and socio-cultural oppression, outlasting apartheid and patriarchy and relentlessly forging their own identity (Nzimande 2005: 23-25). The liberatory trajectory and intent of the term are clear, demarcating a terrain *within which* postcolonial criticism can make its contributions.

I am not suggesting that we African biblical scholars should dismiss the significant potential of postcolonial discourse; I am arguing rather for a cautious appropriation. The tendency of postcolonial criticism to coopt and elide the historic and current contributions of liberation hermeneutics must be resisted, as must the anachronistic tendency to use the discourse to do 'business as usual' socio-historical biblical reconstruction. The commodification-consumption tendencies of postcolonialism have not only coopted context-based liberation hermeneutics (as in the case of Mosala's work), they have also coopted (and deconstructed?) the traditional socio-historical work of mainstream biblical scholarship.⁶

The clearest proponent of this latter tendency has been Fernando Segovia. His careful mappings of postcolonial studies have made a substantial contribution to the emergent field of postcolonial biblical criticism, providing a clear analysis of its dimensions. But it is his interventions on behalf of postcolonial studies and ancient texts that interest me here. In an early piece in which he begins to delineate the contours of 'a postcolonial optic', he notes that:

A first dimension of a postcolonial optic in biblical criticism involves an analysis of the texts of ancient Judaism and early Christianity that takes seriously into consideration their broader sociocultural contexts in the Near East and the Mediterranean Basin, respectively, in the light of an omnipresent, inescapable and overwhelming sociopolitical reality—the reality of empire, of imperialism and colonialism, as variously constituted and exercised during the long period in question (Segovia 1998: 56).

6. That almost everybody in biblical studies is writing a book about 'empire' demonstrates how the boundaries between 'business-as-usual' socio-historical biblical scholarship (albeit with trendy sounding titles) has come to occupy some of the same discourse terrain as postcolonial studies. Joerg Rieger's *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* is an excellent example of the importance of differentiating between 'ancient' empires and the more recent manifestations of empire properly described as 'postcolonialism' (Rieger 2007).

He then goes on to argue, therefore, that ‘the shadow of empire in the production of ancient texts is to be highlighted’, and suggests a range of questions that might be put to the socio-historical reality of empire *in these ancient texts*. I emphasize the prepositional phrase because it is clear that Segovia is here focussing on the ancient context of production, not current postcolonial readings and actual postcolonial readers—the two other aspects of postcolonial biblical criticism he delineates (Segovia 1998: 57–58). But it is precisely, I would argue, these aspects that constitute ‘postcolonialism proper’! Postcolonial studies emerges from *the reality of the actual lived experiences of particular forms of colonialism* (Slemon 1994)! Projecting it back into ancient texts and their contexts of production is somewhat anachronistic. But Segovia is determined to push for this retrospective move.

In a later essay which continues his project of mapping the postcolonial optic, Segovia carefully maps how postcolonial studies have developed as a critical movement. As he reviews the literature he notes, again and again, that postcolonial studies ‘confines’ itself to the study of texts produced in the process of western colonization (Segovia 2005: 28). But in his view ‘its scope is much too limited’, for it ‘should actively entertain the study of colonialism in transhistorical and transcultural perspective’ (Segovia 2005: 29 n. 9). And even in those studies that do present imperialism and colonialism as transhistorical and transcultural, Segovia notes that ‘they point to a fundamental grounding of the field in the conditions, practices, and effects of the Western formation’ (Segovia 2005: 45). He worries aloud whether ‘such grounding is deemed descriptive or prescriptive’, for he wants to open up postcolonial studies to the transhistorical and transcultural worlds of ancient biblical texts. In sum, in his view, ‘the distinctive characteristics’ of western empire, imperialism, and colonialism ‘should not prevent inquiry into other historical and cultural formations’ (Segovia 2005: 46 n. 34).

Segovia does provide a glimpse of the kind of hermeneutic he intends in prising out this pre-postcolonial colonial space when he says, in concluding his mapping, that he ‘subscribes to the view that imperial-colonial formations represent long-standing and wide-ranging phenomena, present across historical periods and cultural contexts’, and that he therefore sees ‘no reason why postcolonial analysis should be limited to the modern and capitalist formations of the West’; indeed, he continues, ‘I see comparative analysis as justified and in order’ (Segovia 2005: 75). While I agree with Segovia that comparative analysis is certainly useful, we should take care not to deflect the emphasis of postcolonial hermeneutics from its sites of formation in *our own* struggles.⁷

7. Similar caution should be exercised with respect to the concept of ‘class’, which has its origins in particular ‘modern’ social analysis, but which like ‘postcolonialism’ does lend itself to useful comparative analysis with ancient contexts.

Earlier, Richard Horsley had been more overt in the specific dimensions of this kind of hermeneutic. A committed social activist and socio-historical biblical critic, Horsley has made occasional forays into postcolonial biblical interpretation from the perspective of his 'normal' socio-historical biblical work. Citing Mosala's work on the need to recognise the class-based (in terms of the socio-economic 'class' formations of a particular period) redactional layers in the biblical text, Horsley goes on to note that 'post-colonial criticism of prevailing politico-economic and cultural relations in the modern world makes it possible to discern, often for the very first time, the concrete ways in which the various layers in biblical literature are the products of the very emergence of (struggle for) domination and authority' (Horsley 1998: 153). However, Horsley is slow to embrace postcolonial discourse, precisely because, as he says (in an argument reminiscent of Boer's) postcolonialism 'may often divert attention from contemporary problems of social, political, and cultural domination and obfuscate its own relationship to the conditions of its own emergence, that is to a global capitalism that structures global economic, political, and cultural relations' (Horsley 1998: 153). And we do not, he hastens to add, 'want our postcolonial criticism that aims to resist and undo colonial cultural hegemony to become, in effect, complicitous in consecrating the new global capitalist domination by our failure to address the latter's mechanisms and our relations to it' (Horsley 1998: 154).

Horsley then proposes a hermeneutic within which the kind of work envisaged by Segovia might take place; significantly it rests on the liberation hermeneutics of Mosala. However, he does accept with some hesitation that 'perhaps by discerning the ancient imperial context of biblical materials in order better to appreciate their agenda we can be more critically prepared to 'read' the current postcolonial or neo-imperial situation in which we want to intervene' (Horsley 1998: 154). So while contributing an essay to a volume on postcolonialism, in a book edited by Sugirtharajah called *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sugirtharajah 1998), Horsley resists co-option, nailing his liberation colours to the mast and prefacing his appropriation of post-colonial discourse with cautionary comments and activist intent.

Furthermore, like Boer, Jobling, and myself, Horsley recognises that resisting empire requires 'an alternative way of conceiving history... a metanarrative that enables a movement to maintain its own identity and solidarity over against the pretensions of the imperial metanarratives' (Horsley 1998: 161). Horsley is here acutely aware that the postcolonial tendency to emphasize 'mininarratives' (Horsley 1998: 161 n. 2) and 'micropolitics' (Boer 1998: 43-44), important as the particularities of each local context are, must be dialectically related to the capacity of liberation metanarratives to resist the neo-liberal capitalist empire's capacity to further fragment and dis-integrate and co-opt and consume local struggles. While we should be

worried by metanarratives, Horsley recognizes their potential for resistance and emancipatory reconstruction in the face of the deadly metanarratives of empire.

Conclusion

Sugirtharajah is right when he asserts that postcolonialism 'is about both the state of affairs in colonial times and the state of affairs that exists in the fraught aftermath of imperialism' (Sugirtharajah 2001: 246). Here lie the 'originary' struggles that generate the discourse; and the discourse cannot be separated from their '@home-ness' without the kind of loss Sugirtharajah describes in his diasporic lament.

Sugirtharajah is right when he questions whether 'everything is post-colonial' (Sugirtharajah 2001: 268), because everything is not. So while I hear Segovia's plea for extending postcolonialism backwards into biblical history, I worry that this smooths and 'flattens out' (Sugirtharajah 2001: 268) the particulars of different colonial experiences and the specifics that gave rise to postcolonialism in our era. Unless we deliberately employ the kind of hermeneutic advocated by Mosala and Horsley, postcolonial-like analyses of ancient biblical texts becomes just one more commodification perpetuated by a benign and apolitical postcolonial industry.

Sugirtharajah is partially right when he notes that postcolonial discourse 'is torn between its use of mutually incompatible critical categories such as Marxism and poststructuralism' (Sugirtharajah 2001: 246). More accurately, postcolonialism lacks the capacity to provide a hermeneutic in which each of these sets of critical categories has a place. Once again liberation theology provides what postcolonialism lacks, in the guise of Cornel West's work. The African American Black theologian offers a persuasive hermeneutic which combines three strands: poststructuralism, progressive Marxism, and prophetic Christianity. He argues convincingly that poststructuralism 'can serve as a useful springboard for a more engaged, even subversive, philosophical perspective', and even 'lend itself to emancipatory ends in that it proposes the tenuous self-images and provisional vocabularies that undergird past and present social orders as central objects of criticism' (C. West 1985: 270). Cornel West continues that such shifts are particularly significant for those on the underside of history because 'oppressed people have more at stake than others in focusing on the tenuous and provisional vocabularies which have had and do have hegemonic status in past and present societies' (C. West 1985: 271). But while poststructuralism is able to deconstruct it does not know how to get its hands dirty or to dream (C. West 1982b: 183, 185). Indeed, the danger is that postcolonialism as a sub-set of postmodernism will settle for the play of postcolonial technique rather than its more socially engaged, political, forms—and so in my own

context I worry about some of the recent work of my colleagues Punt and England (e.g. Punt 2007; England 2007). Poststructuralism must, therefore, be part of a larger project, a 'countermovement', says Cornel West, a 'new gospel of the future' (1983: 190). And, argues Cornel West, for this larger project what is needed is the social theory and political praxis of progressive Marxism and the resources of prophetic Christianity (1982a).

So the problem is not, as Sugirtharajah argues above, 'mutually incompatible critical categories'. The problem is a relevant hermeneutic that makes use of both sets of critical categories. I am not sure postcolonialism offers this. Does postcolonialism know how to dream? I am not sure. What is clear is that African biblical scholars who have made use of postcolonialism are not yet persuaded. We insist on using what it offers within a liberation (including African feminism) and/or an inculturation paradigm.

Finally, Sugirtharajah is wrong when he says that 'Postcolonialism is about a set of measures worked out by diasporan Third World intellectuals in order to undo, reconfigure and redraw contingent boundaries of hegemonic knowledges' (Sugirtharajah 2001: 246). He is not wrong about the deconstructive, resisting, and reconstituting task; he is wrong about the agents of this task. Indeed, I am alarmed when he states that 'What diasporic hermeneutics has done is to make regional-based theologies such as African, Asian, or Latin American almost redundant' (Sugirtharajah 2006a: 6). I am grateful for the 'almost', but want to make it clear that (South) African biblical interpretation and theologies remain rooted in continental African realities. As far as African biblical scholarship and theology is concerned, the centre of African academic gravity has not yet shifted to the diaspora. From the beginning the task has been initiated and taken up @home. Those of us who have left home to other sites of struggle in the centre of empire should not elide those who remain @home and who get their hands dirty in the soil of African struggles and dare to dream of transformation in actual postcolonial contexts. To do so, those who have remained @home are willing to use whatever resources seem useful, including postcolonial discourse.

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POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AS ACADEMIC DOUBLE AGENT? POWER, IDEOLOGY AND POSTCOLONIAL BIBLICAL HERME- NEUTICS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Jeremy Punt

In an earlier study on postcolonial biblical studies it was concluded that postcolonial criticism in very distinct ways confirms that interpretation is always influenced by reigning and dominant cultural values, and that all interpretation subscribes to cultural codes, thought-patterns and social locations of its interpreters (Punt 2006).¹ The pervasive and enduring legacy of colonization in South Africa—and much of the ensuing argument will hold true also for Southern Africa—and the world over necessitates awareness of and willingness to disentangle biblical studies and colonial culture, otherwise the connection—and its influence—and the colonial legacy will be perpetuated in biblical studies (Peskowitz 1996: 180). Like postcolonial studies in general, postcolonial *biblical* hermeneutics cannot be content to merely fit into the prominent (which may become another term for hegemonic) discourses of the academy, but has to strive for and even initiate change in structure and content, if not also in epistemology.² This can indeed be a major contribution of the postcolonial approach in biblical studies: '[P]ostcolonialism will continue to challenge the context and contours of biblical interpretation, and the existing notions and preconceptions of professional guilds and academics' (Sugirtharajah 1998b: 21). In a book honouring Professor Rasiah Sugi Sugirtharajah who has played and continues to play a prominent and

1. See also the interesting examples from eighth-century Saxon poetry (Germanic chieftainship and Christology), the more familiar examples of Anselm's atonement theology (with a medieval peasant's insult of the king as the reference), Luther's reinterpretation of justification by faith (in the era of emerging individualism), and Bultmann's existentialist interpretation (reacting to Heideggerian existentialism) offered by Sugirtharajah (1999a: 104-105).

2. Such challenges are necessary in order to counter the epistemic violence of colonization, even if some scholars are somewhat sceptical about the nature and commitment of postcolonial studies in this regard: 'Given its poststructuralist inheritance, recent postcolonial critique tends to favour those varieties of counter-hegemonic anti-colonialisms which subvert rather than reverse the chronic oppositions of colonial discourse' (Gandhi 1998: 112).

steering role in many significant discussions within postcolonial biblical studies, this contribution wants to tease out the implications of such laudable aspirations in post-colonial South Africa, particularly since in this context postcolonial biblical studies has largely been met by reluctance and even dismissal (Punt 2006).

While the use of 'postcolonial' as condition, concept and approach has become more common in biblical studies in recent years, it has remained to some degree a contested notion among biblical scholars.³ Given this situation, it is inevitable but probably also useful to subject the term 'post-colonial' to further reflection, particularly with regard to analogous and paradigmatic theoretical positions, but also with regard to its own political praxis in the academy and beyond.⁴ In biblical studies in particular, postcolonial theory is often closely aligned with ideological-critical approaches to

3. Segovia has recently referred to postcolonial biblical criticism as having a 'still incipient character and limited output of such criticism' (Segovia 2007: 156).

4. Postcolonial is used non-hyphenated to disavow the 'implied chronological separation between colonialism and its aftermath', as the postcolonial condition finds its inception with the imposition and not the termination of colonial occupation (Gandhi 1998: 3). Although Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989: 11-13) hyphenate the word, they stress that *postcolonial* refers to all that is covered by the beginning of colonialism, its process and the struggle against it, independence and post-independence. I align myself largely with Wan (2000: 114 n. 1) when he distinguishes between the hyphenated and non-hyphenated forms by seeing the former as 'the situation after the departure of colonial power' and the latter as referring to 'the hermeneutical construct based on such a condition'. Thus, and without forcing an undue separation, my use of *postcolonial* is more as a philosophical/political marker of resistance to the practice of colonialism than a historical marker referring to a time after colonialism (Gallagher 1996: 230); or better, 'the postcolonial as conscientization, a realization of the problematic of domination and subordination in the geopolitical realm' (Segovia 2005: 65). Used somewhat loosely, colonialism refers to 'any relation of structural domination which relies upon a self-serving suppression of "the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question"' (Gandhi 1998: 85, citing Talpade Mohanty); this reference still requires further attention for the nomenclature 'postcolonial'. Segovia (2000a: 133-35) proposes to maintain it for the time being, but expresses his own preference for 'imperial-colonial' as a more adequate expression. Segovia rightly insists that 'imperialism' and 'colonialism' refer to different discourses, those that pertain to the center and those that pertain to the margins or periphery. In short, postcoloniality is taken to refer to the full extent of the practical condition following colonialism, the aftermath of which is present since the inception of colonialism. Postcolonialism refers to the theorization of colonization, the 'theoretical attempt to engage with a particular historical condition' (Gandhi 1998: 4), even when colonial is expanded to include 'any form of social, political, or economic subjugation undertaken by a state and its allied institutions' (Avalos 1996: 88). However, while attending to vestiges of historical colonialism, neo-colonialism and other forms of modern hegemony and imperialistic endeavours in their various forms and different contexts are also scrutinized. For a recent, detailed mapping of the postcolonial optic, see Segovia 2005: 23-78.

interpretation (at times under the auspices of a hermeneutics of suspicion), which of course could but does not have to lead to a disregard for numerous other ways in which it is also put to use.

It will be suggested that an important reason why postcolonial biblical studies, notwithstanding its avowed benefits and potential especially in postcolonial contexts and without ignoring some contestation, has not won wider acclaim in academic—and even quasi-academic circles⁵—in a context such as post-colonial, post-Apartheid South Africa is due to a peculiar but interesting predicament. A number of the very same epistemological and theoretical-practical elements of postcolonial theory which make this theoretical approach so eminently suitable for analysis and inquiry in Two-Thirds World biblical studies are simultaneously also the very reasons why, as a theoretical position, postcolonial biblical hermeneutics is still widely discounted in—among others—South Africa. In short, postcolonial biblical criticism is perceived as an academic double agent, betraying the very notions it claims to serve!

Why Postcolonial Biblical Studies in South Africa?

If postcolonial analysis is indeed perceived as an ambivalent, and even ambiguous, operational framework for reading the Bible in South Africa, it is fair to ask about its particular value. In response, it is useful to note that employing postcolonial or vernacular hermeneutics, which is necessarily context-sensitive and alert to local language and culture, a critic tends to celebrate, in a postmodern way, the local and subverts prevailing foreign theories and practice in a postcolonial fashion (Sugirtharajah 1999b: 12). Moreover, reading the Bible in (South) Africa in a way that allows the voices of the marginalized to be heard *and* stimulates simultaneously hybrid interpretations can help avoid the unfortunate consequences of counter-discourses that preserve the binary opposition and re-establish a privileged reading even as they seek to subvert the basis of discriminatory polarity (Berquist 1996: 33).

It is the postcolonial inclination in the particular that allows and, in fact, creates room for the voices from the periphery, for indigenous readings and for listening to and acknowledging the contributions of the subalterns. But while such vernacular hermeneutics cautions against the danger of minimizing and rationalizing such contributions to biblical reading, it is also acutely aware of the danger of romanticizing or idealizing the contribution of the marginalized. Like all other real, flesh-and-blood readers, postcolonial

5. This situation might be construed differently when the scenario presented by Dube (2000: 184-95) with regard to African Indigenous Churches is considered. However, Dube is presenting a case of popular interpretation along postcolonial lines, while I am focussing here on academic discourse.

readers and their readings are local, perspectival, interested and thus contextualized and ideological (Segovia 1998: 52). The intrinsic peril for a project such as Africanization, for example, is the very human attempt to once again substitute the own for the all, and thus to make over the other in the image and on the terms of the self. Edward Said's caution is still applicable: 'A single over-mastering identity at the core of the academic enterprise, whether that identity be Western, African, or Asian, is a confinement, a deprivation' (Said 1991: 17). The focus on the local, on the vernacular, on the *own* can hardly afford to be oblivious to the impact of a *globalized* world. Without revalorizing or even resuscitating past inequities, there is a need to move beyond the confines of parochialism, however valid a strategic parochialism might have been during a certain period or given certain circumstances.⁶

With a rapidly shrinking world and the plurality of its inhabitants increasingly exposed to one another, claiming identity for an unadulterated indigenous culture has become progressively unattainable. Sugirtharajah writes, 'At a time when vernacular cultures and languages are intermingled with those of the metropolis, it is not always feasible to use dialect as a test of identity' (1999b: 15; see also Sugirtharajah 1999a: 112; Brett 1998: 313). Moreover, the academy's recourse to claims of a pure vernacular culture may become either a utopian stance or a manipulative ploy, both of which serve to secure hermeneutical privilege, but this course of action ultimately amounts to little more than participation in myth making or creative hermeneutical imagination. Both myth making and creative hermeneutical imagination may be appropriate responses to contemporary notions of and actions regarding culture and/or identity, but their inherent dangers as well as the (possible) solipsistic nature of such enterprises need to be acknowledged and considered. For biblical studies in South Africa, it means that postcolonial thinking is helpful in (1) identifying both the often forgotten subjugated of the past *and* the lingering marginalized of the present; (2) describing forces of imperialism and hegemony *along with* accounting for their effects upon those at the peripheries; (3) reflecting upon the history and nature of the skewing power structures of the past and present, the impact and consequences of these on people's lives—and in all of these seeming binaries, not to configure such pairs as mutually exclusive opposites but rather to

6. When the focus shifts from an emphasis on nationalism to affirming national consciousness, a number of possibilities present themselves to be explored. For example, can postcolonial biblical criticism allow for the integration of the liberation (e.g. Black Theologies) and cultural (e.g. African Theologies) foci in approaches to the Bible (and theology) in Africa to accommodate both suspicion and retrieval, the local/vernacular and global/metropolitan, the indigenous and diaspora, and so on? Can it not also shift the mangled debate about the possibility, advisability and nature of a (yet to be developed) authentic African hermeneutic, towards the search for elements to be incorporated into an African-infused hybrid hermeneutic?

account for their reciprocal influences on one another; and (4) asking about the appropriate epistemological tools for dealing with all these concerns. It is amidst such concerns that postcolonial biblical criticism seems such a fitting approach.

Reinvoking Ideology? Postcolonial as Ideological Criticism

Postcolonial biblical studies is not so much another methodological acquisition dangling from a bag already filled to the brim with hermeneutical methods, since it in fact utilizes a variety of different methodologies (Sugirtharajah 1998a: 15). While excluding certain approaches on grounds of their epistemological, philosophical or even imperialist stances regarding matters such as truth and reality and on grounds of entrenched (read: hegemonic) positions in academy,⁷ ideological criticism has been recognized as one of the most prominent influences, and even a kind of centripetal force in postcolonial biblical studies. Thus, in its efforts to retrieve and make heard the voice of the subjugated, postcolonial biblical studies mostly operate in the mode of ideology criticism (Segovia 2000a: 119-32). Amidst a variety of hermeneutical approaches characterized by their political nature and ideological agenda, postcolonial biblical hermeneutics can thus appropriately be described as operating within the framework of a textual politics of suspicion,⁸ as well as of retrieval or restoration. In its interaction with colonial history and its aftermath, the postcolonial not only focuses on histories of repression and repudiation but also—through exposé—engages in restoration and transformation.

Postcolonial biblical criticism's association with ideology criticism comprises two elements in particular: (1) the inevitable link between the ideological nature of texts and vested interests related to social formations;

7. While the importance of a historical perspective, and a critical one at that, is important in postcolonial studies, it is doubtful whether the claim that 'postcolonial criticism does not reject the insights of historical criticism' (Kwok 2005: 80) is altogether appropriate. See, for example, Segovia 1995: 278-85; 2000a: 39 on the danger of 'promiscuous marriages' of theoretical frameworks of perspective (also Schüssler Fiorenza 1999: 38-39). On the other hand, this is not to deny historical criticism's initial suspicious and against-the-grain readings of ecclesially authorized readings of the Bible (Barton 1998: 16-19).

8. A hermeneutics of suspicion—the narrative of the "text" behind the ancient narrative—was more typical of nineteenth-century historical criticism (Segovia 2000b: 62 n. 2), but can also be traced to Paul Ricoeur, who used this for critical interpretations that show the difference between apparent or surface meanings and the deeper effect of a text. As the phrase is used generally, it signals concern with what the text is perceived to stand for—the world projected by the text—as in some way negative or detrimental to its readers.

and (2) the importance given to socio-political context and the interpreter's stance within it. In as far as ideology is connected to language and meaning, to ideas and systems of thought and belief in such a way that the interests of the powerful and ruling groups are best served—primarily by presenting their positions and actions as normal and righteous—all texts in their reflection and refraction of reality stand in a relation of some sort to the vested interests of the contexts and people from where they originated.⁹ Ideological criticism is intent on exposing not only overt self-interests and unconcealed support for certain factions, but also the covert backing and self-justification afforded to the dominant in society (Rowland 2006: 657). However, since texts are always imbued with ambivalences and ambiguities and hence indicative of the intricacies of their originating real-world contexts, texts conceal underneath their concern for the dominant or hegemonic also elements more characteristic of the oppositional culture or values (Rowland 2006: 655-71).

Postcolonial criticism is aligned with ideological criticism, secondly, in its concern to account for the importance of social location in biblical interpretation. Like liberation hermeneutics, it therefore considers the socio-political context and the interpreter's stance within it to be of primary importance. Location is an important heuristic and political matter. Time, distance and space are categories of prime significance; together with the autobiographical,¹⁰ they help us come to grips with imperialist and hegemonic structures of oppression. Moreover, '[t]he interpreter has not only a discursive function but also an interventionist one which is ethically and ideologically committed' (Sugirtharajah 2007: 465). Not only was the imperial context constitutive for the development and production of New Testament texts, but the location and practices of interpretation are also influential for the reception of these texts. The politics of biblical interpretation assumes significance beyond being the tools of the trade and the locations where the trade is practiced (Punt 2006).

However, postcolonial biblical studies' indebtedness to ideological criticism is not necessarily experienced as a positive element. In a recent anthology of postcolonial biblical studies, Sugirtharajah commends postcolonial interpretations as 'alternative and counter-readings of biblical texts which, like other resistance readings, complicate and fracture the received interpretation and refuse to adopt a simple and single reflection on reality' (2006: 131). However, in the same breath—and in support of

9. This does not mean that texts 'have' ideologies (Fowl 1995), since '[a] text will not usually produce a particular ideology in a "pure" form' (Rowland 2006: 659). Indeed, '[i]t is part of the task of interpretation to lay bare the ambiguities and contradictions that are inherent in all texts' (Rowland 2006: 659, 662).

10. Autobiographical criticism often resists the personal, but emphasizes political, economical or social/cultural systems—local or global—which cause inequitable power relations and downright oppression.

Stephen Moore (2006b: 197)—the ideological-critical slant is noted as a limitation. While poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and Marxism¹¹ have often become the driving forces within postcolonial criticism outside the discipline of biblical studies, biblical scholarship mostly still avails itself of ideology critique and operates within a framework of a hermeneutics of suspicion (Sugirtharajah 2006: 131).

Without discounting its indebtedness to and the value it derives from ideological criticism, postcolonial studies is poised and well situated to also move beyond it. Postcolonial analysis can specifically also address the silencing of the Other through the colonial strategy of posing the colonized as the inverse of the colonizer and so emptying the colonized world of meaning and/or vilifying the colonized Other in binary terms: the savage versus the civilized, the emotional/stupid versus the rational/intelligent, the heathen versus the religiously committed. Postcolonial studies provide heuristic tools for understanding the link, notwithstanding its inequality in all respects, between colonizer and colonized (Gandhi 1998: 15; Punt 2006).

Antipathy towards Postcolonial Biblical Criticism in Africa

Such laudable intentions, backed up by useful heuristic methodological tools and robust scholarship from within and outside biblical studies, create the expectation that postcolonial theory and criticism would in the field of biblical studies on the African continent—and in South Africa in particular—receive a hearty welcome. Yet the opposite has been the case until now. Postcolonial biblical criticism has been met with at best a mild reception, ranging from a suspicious disregard of its political commitment if not academic integrity to actual antagonism for its potential to unsettle other methodologies that are perceived to be more socially engaged, religiously committed, politically uncomplicated and so forth. Many possible reasons can be offered to explain the indifference towards an intellectual and methodological approach eminently suitable for the postcolonial condition of twenty-first century Africa. Moving beyond some earlier arguments (Punt 2006),¹² what should be added here is that it increasingly appears to

11. The (different) pleas by Boer and Jobling in Moore and Segovia (2005) were commented on in Punt 2008. I will have more to say about Marxism and postcolonial biblical criticism in a later section of this paper.

12. I have suggested in that earlier essay the following perceptions and/or factors for the disappointing reaction to postcolonial biblical studies in Punt 2006: it is seen to serve the academy rather than the church; perceived weak textual politics; difficulties surrounding the status of the biblical texts; tradition(s) of interpretation from Western scientific discourse and Enlightenment humanism to colonial mimicry; and hybridity confronting the nationalist agenda. The further pursuance of some of these points is necessitated by my arguments in this contribution. It is also interesting to note some

be exactly those elements which make postcolonial biblical criticism such a formidable exegetical and socio-political tool that have contributed to what has so far been its indifferent treatment in South Africa. In other words, it is those very elements and attributes that make postcolonial analysis so valuable for use in South Africa that work against its appropriation. Five particular aspects can be mentioned here.

Unsettling Liberation Theology? Beyond Turf Wars

The relationship between liberation hermeneutics/theology and postcolonial hermeneutics is strong but complex, and makes for some uneasiness and even rivalry between the two approaches to biblical texts. To quote the observation of K. Latvus:

Postcolonial criticism does not imitate liberation hermeneutics but obviously owes a lot to this tradition. Both approaches share a commitment to 'the other' (not in power, ignored, marginalized) and both also emphasize empowerment of the oppressed. Liberation theology/hermeneutics was, however, a child of modernity and a battering ram against the fortified castles of traditionalism. As such it represented the ideological approaches and atmosphere of the 1970s-80s (2006: 187).

It is, however, not only the influence of liberation thinking on postcolonial theory that has to be acknowledged, but also, as one of Boer's modern day-*Symposium* dialogue partners would have it, that postcolonial studies 'have given liberation theology a new lease of life' (Boer 2007: 136). In the end, postcolonial and liberation thinking feeds off each other, with far-reaching mutual influences that sustain each approach in its respective way.

Postcolonial theory as used in Two-Thirds World contexts of doing theology follows in the footsteps of liberation theology, particularly the purpose of doing theology to simultaneously focus on denouncing injustices and providing alternatives. However, their ways eventually separate since '[p]ostcolonial theology complicates the horizon of liberation and also Christianity as a liberative force' (Althaus-Reid 2002: 400). On the one hand, a number of problems can be registered against postcolonial theory from a liberationist perspective regarding issues of race and class.¹³

discussion on this issue that has emerged in South Africa. While England intimates that postcolonial criticism will take off in South Africa to the extent that the previously subjugated and marginalized voices are dug up and become an integral part of the postcolonial discourse (2004), West questions whether postcolonial criticism, even when aligning itself, say, with Marxist or feminist theories, has the capacity for the requisite political or social engagement required in the (Southern) African context (2008). This leads, in West's view, to its lacklustre performance on African soil.

13. In contrast, racial categories as intermeshed with concepts of nation, rationality and literature can be investigated with the help of postcolonial analysis. Kelley, for example, suggests, 'The postcolonial emphasis on hybridity manages to acknowledge

Such critique starts with postcolonialism's focus on discursive colonialism without paying sustained attention to the material situation, which requires (more) awareness of and dealing with those who were by force made to receive the Bible and with their histories of resistance (or creativity).

On the other hand, some postcolonial critics lament that a liberationist view—notwithstanding its departure from ‘“the principle of critical reality” as the starting point of any hermeneutical circle’—operates too often from a naive perspective (Althaus-Reid 2002: 398) and does not come to terms with ‘diversity, particular cultural heritages, a world vision and society where religious plurality is everyday fact’ (Althaus-Reid 2002: 401). Liberation theology's ‘sometimes overzealous attempts to harmonize dogmas and structural understanding, and also the traditions of the church’ in the pursuit of grounding ‘popular theology’, often, in the eyes of some postcolonial critics, failed (Althaus-Reid 2002: 401).¹⁴

In postcolonial studies, the emphasis on liberation comes through a re-focused dynamic between identity and social power, with the realization of the necessary and mutually defining binary relationship between subjugated and dominant identities. As Moore writes, ‘A defining feature of “postcolonial” biblical exegesis, indeed, as distinct from (although by no means in opposition to) “liberationist” biblical exegesis, is a willingness to press a biblical text at precisely those points at which its ideology falls prey to ambivalence, incoherence, and self-subversion—not least where its message of emancipation subtly mutates into oppression’ (Moore 2006b: 197). Askance to liberationist hermeneutics—that is, not thinking unequivocally in terms of victim and perpetrator—two particular aspects or dimensions within postcolonial thinking resist an unqualified liberation approach. *Ambivalence*, understood as a major characteristic of the postcolonial condition, and—in terms of identity politics—the *hybridity* of both colonizer as well as colonized have exacted in postcolonial studies a greater appreciation for a more complex situation and condition than what an unambiguous denouncement of Western imperialism and colonialism and their consequences are often willing to consider, or worst, to allow.¹⁵

the reality and power of racialized discourse and to contest that discourse from within. It also helps highlight the contested, fluid, constantly changing nature both of identity and of textuality’ (2002: 224; cf. 5, 211).

14. Liberation as a concept harbours a divisive, potentially destructive binary that can lead to polarization, animosity and conflict. This binary merely turns the tables on oppressor and oppressed, without really breaking through the practices of the past or posing an alternative. A caution frequently heard concerning liberationist approaches is their worrying tendency to equate what is authoritative with whatever is liberating (Polaski 2005: 4).

15. Claims to hermeneutical privilege are challenged in postcolonial criticism (Segovia 2000b: 59-83). This challenge is based on the refusal to submit to the ranking

In the end, however, it remains a question whether the link between liberation and postcolonial hermeneutics, at least in biblical studies and in a country like South Africa, can be severed altogether.¹⁶ As Moore argues so cogently,

In the Two-Thirds World, meanwhile (to continue to paint with an overly broad brush), it is not hard to imagine the liberationist variant of postcolonial biblical criticism continuing to ride in the slipstream of contextual hermeneutics—and continuing to counter postcolonial biblical criticism's inherent inclination as an academic enterprise to coagulate into an esoteric discourse herme(neu)tically sealed off from the extra-academic world (Moore 2006a: 23).

The perceived—academic but also conceptual—threat of postcolonialism for liberationist thinking may have a big role in the disregard of the former within the South African context.¹⁷ It appears that a postcolonial approach not explicitly aligned with liberation hermeneutics and theology, notwithstanding the former's contribution to the latter, is found wanting, and even dismissed.

Continuing Struggles about Agency and Identity?

In the complex, dialectical relationship that exists between colonizer and colonized, postcolonial reflection and theory have shown that agency and identity are not only constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed as part of the colonial project, but often also in ways that the colonizers could not foresee.

of readings based on a hierarchy of social locations (and thus the denial of the 'most oppressed' as necessarily having the 'best reading'); this refusal does not, however, imply that multiple readings and social locations do not exist.

16. Since both the postcolonial and the liberationist can manifest differently in various social locations, stereotyped presentations of the two should in any case be avoided. Interestingly, notwithstanding his staunch criticism of liberation theology (Sugirtharajah 2001: 203-275; 2002: 103-123), Sugirtharajah's relationship with it is to some extent one of indebtedness (as in evident in Sugirtharajah 1998a; 2001; 2002; 2003); see also Moore and Segovia (2005: 6).

17. The value of a theological approach that interacts with the broad reach and influence of empire entails a move beyond 'contextual theology' for at least two reasons. Contextual theology is often characterized by an approach that deals with that which is visible at surface level and does not always penetrate to the deeper levels, missing what lies between the lines. Yet, as Rieger comments, 'There is still too little awareness that context may not be what is closest to home, but that what needs attending is 'what hurts' and what lies below the surface' (2007: 7-8). Secondly, contextual theology also tends to operate in the mode of responding, in the sense that 'theological resources are interpreted in 'correlation' to contextual concerns in such a way that context comes to determine theology' (Rieger 2007: 7-8). It remains of course a question how to ensure that the inevitable entanglement of theology(-ies) and context(s) is taken seriously, without allowing either to overwhelm the other, or the one to be used to define the other.

It was in fact the contradictory nature of Anglo-European imperialism that provided the colonized people with the requisite physical, economic and conceptual tools in the form of 'individual subjectivity and agency; collective identity in a nation-state; [and] racial and ethnic identity' as the very elements that set off anti-colonialism and postcolonialism (Boer 2005: 174). However, postcolonial criticism—which (1) stresses agency to the point of making the subjugated the subject of history; and (2) both points and wants to retrieve the voices of the Others of the colonial onslaught—becomes suspect when it is at the same time seen to deprive the victims of hegemony again from their access to agency and identity (Smith 2004: 49 n. 10). Dispossession from agency and identity enters through downplaying them as lost causes; as one scholar argues, '[t]he quest for social identity is just one more vain search for the solace of origins, perpetually contested and itself the source of injustice' (Brett 1998: 307 n. 15, citing Furrow).

Broadly speaking, postcolonial studies has indeed in different parts of the world contributed to the study of identity in contemporary society, and in the process initiated discussions about and drawn attention to identity's ambivalence and hybridity. This is so on especially two fronts. One is its virulent struggle against the 'amnesia of colonialism', given the strong impulse of colonialism to impose the colonizers', or Western, or worse still, universal sense of identity. The hegemony of Western identity facilitated the systematic erasure or marginalization of an indigenous (awareness of) identity through the destruction of local culture by the foreign culture (e.g. Hutcheon 1991).¹⁸

The other aspect (as alluded to above) concerns the unlikelihood if not simple impossibility of formulating an unspoilt, native culture amidst an increasingly fast globalizing world. To take one's cultural identity and ethnicity seriously enough to both acknowledge and affirm their impact on biblical hermeneutics is certainly empowering. However, what happens when ethnocentricity as 'an ineluctable feature of exegesis' 'occludes rather than promotes *intercultural* and *interethnic* dialogue between contemporary groups' (Wan 2000: 107)?¹⁹ Therefore, Wan's warning is appropriate:

18. While constraining dialogue with poststructuralism and postmodernism, the search for national identity, reclaiming pre-colonial integrity and uprightness and literary political intervention strategies (unsurprisingly) drive the postcolonial debate in South African literary circles; still, these concerns prove useful for reclaiming postcolonial discourse from its Western captivity, in the sense of epistemic and cultural imperialism (Carusi 1991: 97).

19. Autobiographical criticism becomes inauthentic when, in an extreme postmodernist position, it becomes individualistic and self-referring, 'leaving the individual self as an isolated topography of cultural fragments, cobbled together into an incoherent narrative' (Brett 1998: 307). The focus on individuals, then, ironically, substitutes the old, exclusive concern with the author for a new, exclusive concern for the reader.

'Ethnocentric hermeneutics... all too easily gives way to cultural and ethnic self-aggrandizement and destructive essentialism' (Wan 2000: 109).²⁰

While the emphasis on the *futility* of the quest for (original or native) identity may resonate in academic corridors as theoretically—and even ethically—attractive, such sentiments fail to address the concerns of Two-Thirds World people who not only have been deprived of identity and agency in the past but also continue to struggle to assume agency in their current, postcolonial contexts. Can postcolonial studies be more attuned to the veracity of such social locations and refine positions which too easily warrant an aversion to nativism, reject the quest for origins and refuse the rethinking of agency without relinquishing the value of hybridity for understanding such concerns?

Narrow Academic Enterprise? Ivory-Tower Discourse?

It has already been stressed in sections above that postcolonial critics cannot divorce themselves from being socially engaged, or from acknowledging the importance of social location. To what extent, however, does postcolonialism leave the impression of sophistry when compared to other conceptual, hermeneutical and theological approaches such as liberation thinking and its uncomplicated black-and-white categories? In what way is postcolonial discourse associated with another Western export?²¹ Or, in what ways is it a product moulded from the raw materials and resources of the African or Two-Thirds World but refined for use in Western academic laboratories, only to be then returned for consumption by the Two-Thirds World? In short, is postcolonial thinking not in the end an ivory-tower academic discourse—and a Western import at that—that is too heavily invested in ambivalence, hybridity and other concepts to bring about a clear-cut political programme?

As long as postcolonial biblical criticism is understood as simply an academic and intellectualist pursuit with no impact on or value for people's lives in the broad sense, suspicions will remain. As Sugirtharajah suggests:

However, a few successful attempts at autobiographical approach has turned it into a critically reflective endeavour (e.g. Cosgrove, Weiss and Yeo 2005; Kitzberger 2002; Staley 2005).

20. Whiteman (1992: 129) argues that biblical documents can counter egocentrism and ethnocentrism in their contribution to integral human development. However, as history has shown, these documents have also unfortunately been used to legitimate claims about certain groups being the 'people of God', together with asserting divine sanction for murderous actions!

21. Smith (2004: 49 n. 10) cites the perpetuation of the anti-foundationalist perspectives of poststructuralism (à la Derrida and Foucault) as a criticism against postcolonialism. On the other hand, it is in this regard significant to note that liberation approaches are also influenced by Eurocentric ideas like Marxism (Sugirtharajah 1998a: 16-17).

Unless there is a serious effort to connect the interrogations of these [anti-colonial] narratives with the concerns of people, such as housing, education, health, human rights, and asylum, postcolonial criticism will lose its potency and credibility (2001: 27).

Perhaps contrary to experiences, it is on this score that postcolonial studies can assist or maybe even initiate attempts to 'decolonize' biblical studies as an academic endeavour and discourse, to 'decolonize' 'Christian' biblical interpretation, and the general enterprise to 'decolonize' South Africa through the pushing and pulling of interpretative interests on the African continent.²² Postcolonial criticism may not build houses, teach, heal or provide political status, but in challenging biblical studies (and other, socio-political discourse), it can both expose lingering vestiges of colonialism and lead the way towards new understandings and thus configurations of biblical hermeneutics.

Another interesting dynamic for postcolonial analysis on South African soil is its need to manoeuvre strategically between two binds. On the one hand, there is the danger of losing its own distinctive voice to fit in, academically and intellectually speaking. In South Africa as elsewhere, postcolonialism faces the particular challenge to avoid becoming co-opted by and into other analytical approaches. As one scholar put it, 'the terrain of post-colonial studies remains in danger of becoming colonized by competing academic methodologies' (Slemon 1995: 50). On the other hand, postcolonialism has to face the issue of retaining its distinctiveness teetering on the brink of becoming solipsistic, a particular danger when it is at the same time perceived as too much of a challenge for conventional practice and methodology.

In the broader circle of biblical studies, it seems as if postcolonial hermeneutics is, relatively speaking, easily disregarded as a fad of passing consequence. This is, ironically, partly because of postcolonialism's counter-conventional emphases within the academic pursuit of biblical studies. It is more difficult to establish postcolonial biblical criticism since conventional scholarship is rather reluctant to reflect upon it (Horsley 1995); the social engagement presupposed and required by postcolonial criticism is in that case considered too ideologically laden and thus either irrelevant or a threat to traditional and established approaches.²³

22. Segovia's recent work (Segovia 2000a) stands in stark contrast to the various contributions in Abogunrin (2005), which, notwithstanding claims in this regard, unfortunately does not make use of postcolonial analysis.

23. Two further possible distracting factors may be noted. First, local or indigenous biblical scholars are almost all trained in Western European/American institutions or by other local (or regional) scholars who received their training in the West. In both

The perception of postcolonial biblical criticism's intellectual insularity—or its flipside, social irrelevance—requires much more attention. Examining its geo-political and local foci as well as its material and discursive matrices in global and local postcoloniality is imperative, especially in the context of the new, post-Apartheid South Africa with its continuing confluence and intermingling of racism, gender oppression and homophobia (Spurlin 2001).²⁴

Politically Ambiguous?

Accusations of intellectual insularity and social irrelevance are expanded by some scholars who insist that postcolonial theory is at best politically feeble and at worst counter-productive. Like other cognate theoretical approaches,²⁵ postcolonial criticism has been seen as politically inept and of little significance. It has been heavily criticized by Marxist scholars in particular (Boer 2005; Jobling 2005). To briefly summarize, postcolonial

cases, the traditional historical-critical approach is (largely) still, or at least seen to be, holding sway. Second, another epistemological point of departure of postcolonial criticism, social constructionism, may further constrain its wider reception. In disavowing an essentialism that so often pervades other approaches intent on liberation, postcolonial criticism helps to avoid conventional binaries as being too simplistic and straightforward—or, at least, continuously constructed rather than simply recognized. This important emphasis on the constructed nature of identity can be seen, of course, as a threat to and a possible destabilizing factor in 'essentialist' discourse.

24. This is not to suggest a 'hasty cognitive mapping of race, gender, and other identity-defining categories onto another' (Dayal 2001: 313). Let me note also that while power relations will certainly benefit from Marxist analysis, in South Africa we need more than a social analysis of economic categories, or at least a different positioning thereof. Contradictions in society are more complex than class differentiation and its involvement in modes of production. Oppression needs greater and more focused attention. The creativity or marginality of the poor have to be recognized and accounted for by going beyond the Marxist-Leninist theory of party, where people are political or economic but not cultural agents (Frostin 1988: 182-83).

25. Queer theory as a wide ranging set of perspectives—including gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered experiences as well as 'a theoretical sensibility that pivots on transgression or permanent rebellion' (Seidman 1996: 11)—is immersed in a similar debate as postcolonial theory; namely, the tension between queer theorists and homosexual liberationists. The latter's notion of a natural homosexuality which springs from something essential and ineradicable, is the exact issue which queer theory challenges. Queer theory questions the ability of homosexual liberationists to achieve their goal, when it reaffirms the stability of heterosexually defined categories and thus reinforces heteronormativity by mirroring heterosexuality oppositionally, and ironically provides the rationale for its dominance (e.g. Butler 1990: 147; Schneider 2000a: 9; Schneider 2000b: 208; Seidman 1996: 7-11; Weedon 1999: 51-76). In feminist circles also, some fears are harboured about the dissolution of the 'essential woman' in favour of 'separate, diverse local genders' and their 'ill-effects' for the political goals of feminism (Tolbert 2000: 101).

critics are accused of succumbing to late capitalism or 'capitalist modernity' (Ahmad 1992), and that they address the 'superstructure of imperialism' but ignores its material base. In other words, social formation is neglected and unaffected, and cultural production remains at the level of capitalism. In fact, postcolonial thinking is often criticized for its perceived neglect of Marxism and its considerable conceptual resources (and sometimes also for its seeming inability to admit that Marxism is one of its constitutive elements). Moreover, Marxist scholars are also concerned about the elision of the local in favour of the global in postcolonialism.²⁶

Marxist critics, on the other hand, are charged by their postcolonial counterparts for (1) failing to direct a comprehensive critique against colonial history and ideology; (2) neglecting to consider the historical, cultural and political alterity or difference of the colonized world, *and* (3) being blinded by socio-economic class to such an extent that they fail to perceive any other social difference, and thus ultimately succumbing to the ideology of racism embedded in Western life and thought (Gandhi 1998: 24; Segovia 2000a: 136-37).²⁷ This admittedly all too brief recapitulation of a more sustained and longer-ranging debate between postcolonial and Marxist critics draws attention to the perceived political incompetence of postcolonialism.

One may argue, however, that postcolonial biblical criticism's hermeneutical connection to intercultural or cultural studies—rather than to liberation hermeneutics—is or can be even more subversive and destabilizing than liberation hermeneutics (Althaus-Reid 2002: 401). This is so because, to mention just a few reasons, postcolonial criticism (1) does not deal with essentialisms; (2) acknowledges the complex relationships between oppressor and oppressed; (3) anticipates hegemonic ideology and does not romanticize the liberated oppressed as not also being

26. But see Segovia's retort (1998: 140-41), in which he also pleads for a critical review of both feminism and Marxism. The usefulness of materialist (Marxist) criticism in reading the Bible in South Africa probably needs renewed attention. Not only is the vast majority of South African citizens from the working class, but its overwhelmingly black racial composition has also been victims of apartheid. The Marxist paradigm is limiting in South Africa since racial oppression, though functionally can be read with reference to the proletariat, is not exhausted by such ascription. Racial difference is prevalent also in the social and cultural arena, given the quest for cultural dominance and the formation of a national identity. In addition, Marxism's notion of consciousness and the accompanying work of conscientization and mobilization—while valuable—may reintroduce an imperialist subject because of its dependence on humanism. Such subservience to positivist essentialism amounts to the introduction of a new ideology to replace an older one (Carusi 1991: 99).

27. Said also reminds us of Marx's argument that the benefits of British colonialism more than counteracted its violence and injustices (Gandhi 1998: 33).

ideologically imbued and concerned with power. In short, postcolonial theory is often more realistic than liberationist thinking, even if it is seen as politically less strong.²⁸

A Compromised Bible (and Christian Faith)?

Postcolonial biblical interpretation proves useful for exposing the ambiguities and ambivalences found in the Bible. It provides therefore analytical tools that can explore the texts to allow subjugated voices to surface. While such attempts evoke praise, postcolonial hermeneutics also creates uneasiness, especially in communities of (Christian) faith when it shows how the Bible is also implicated both in the past and in the present as a colonizing agent rather than a pure-bred liberationist document. 'Subjecting the Christian Bible to a postcolonial scrutiny does not reinforce its authority', Sugirtharajah writes, 'but emphasizes its contradictory content' (2002: 101). In postcolonial biblical criticism, the traditional and canonical status of the Bible is compromised because the Bible is perceived—at least, at times—to be part of the problem.

A postcolonial approach to the Bible entails that claims to the Bible as ultimate, final and authoritative source are questioned.²⁹ In fact, such claims are even rejected in favour of dealing with the ambiguous and ambivalences of the text within its socio-historical context. This is hardly a radical position, since the deconstruction of biblical texts and challenges against their canonical position are not restricted to postcolonial biblical criticism but are also present in the tradition of liberation hermeneutics and theology. In liberation theology, it is its strong privileging of lived experience and its active advocacy and engagement for a new social order that inform and influence one's understanding of the Bible. By moving beyond the letter to find the real meaning of the text, '[t]his attitude may manifest itself as a rejection of the priority of Scripture and a subordination of it to the inner understanding which comes through the Spirit' (Rowland 2006: 669).³⁰ However—and without discounting liberationist readings intent on challenging the effective histories of texts,

28. Instead of being its strength as I am arguing here, postcolonialism's aversion to 'totalizing theory' has, of course, been criticized as its weakness (Smith 2004: 49 n. 10).

29. The same is true for the larger concept of canon, as Rowland argues: 'The canon in one sense is a domestication of awkward ideas, but in another sense, in the very process of domestication, it contains within it the minority opposition ideas' (2006: 667-68).

30. The privileging of experience is of course tantamount to neither a claim for neutrality nor theoretical disembowelment. In any case, since experience is always theory-laden or theory-informed, caution is advised in all attempts to contrast the two as totally divorced concepts, the very effort of which may already betray some deep-set essentialist thinking.

reading against the grain and retrieving alternative stories—such practices could subtly both re-establish and reinforce canonical authority.³¹

Postcolonial biblical criticism, engaging the internal inconsistencies of the Bible but interacting also with the challenges brought about by sacred texts of other faith traditions as well as secular texts, has brought about a different appreciation of both the role of the Bible and its interpretation (Sugirtharajah 2002: 204). While postcolonial biblical criticism investigates the liberative potential of texts that is often found in the ambivalences and ambiguities of the texts, it also has to account for how the Bible has been used by oppressors to authorize conquest in the name of salvation *and* liberation, and thus asks whether both salvation and liberation did not become tainted in the process. In fact, is it not already the case that in the Bible itself the liberation of Israel from Egypt looks different from the perspectives of the Canaanites, not to mention the treatment the liberated meted out to others in Canaan?

Going beyond the internal ambivalences and ambiguities of the Bible to also mark out the Bible as problematic at times both past and present may have led to the perception in the South African context that postcolonial biblical criticism is not theologically focussed enough to be employed in biblical hermeneutics and/or to be of service to the faith community.

Conclusion

It is important to try and understand why postcolonial biblical criticism has not (yet?) caught on in South Africa, or in a continent where Arabian, Western and other forms of colonial settlement and occupation have until recently been the norm, not to mention the Southern African region where Apartheid South Africa had, until relatively recently, in deliberate and forceful ways used colonialist practices internally and pursued an active policy of destabilizing its neighbouring states! Yet, on this continent where the postcolonial optic can potentially be an immensely helpful approach and methodology theoretically, conceptually and otherwise, it has been obscure or even non-existent among religion and theology scholars in Africa. Among local biblical interpreters, it is hardly conjuring up any significant interest. Has the postcolonial optic been blurred by other hermeneutical and theological options as diverse as postmodernism, liberation theology and hermeneutics, feminist, womanist and gender criticism? Or has the postcolonial already penetrated some of these and, as a result, already refracted through these formations and discourses?

31. Readings against the grain of the text are always complicated undertakings: 'Only with difficulty is it possible to retrieve from the biblical text an alternative perspective to the dominant ideology which has so permeated the text' (Rowland 2006: 659).

Is the reason for postcolonial biblical criticism's failure to be an obvious or even a mainstream hermeneutical option in South Africa simply an unfortunate lack of sustained attention? Or should postcolonial biblical criticism be perceived as an academic double agent in South Africa, ostensibly concerned with the liberation of the subjugated and bringing about an equitable and sustainable geopolitical society, but betraying such ideals with its so-called academic sophistry, its alleged lack of socio-political and religious commitment and its apparent obscuration through its pandering to a range of other *vested* academic and institutional interests? These questions need and deserve more scholarly attention and discussion.

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ONE STEP BEYOND OR ONE STEP TOO FAR?
TOWARDS A POSTCOLONIAL FUTURE FOR EUROPEAN BIBLICAL
AND THEOLOGICAL SCHOLARSHIP

Ralph Broadbent

The basic argument behind this contribution is that postcolonial criticism, in its many guises and variations, presents a real and present challenge (or danger) to traditional European theology and that the depth of the challenge has yet to be fully recognized. Rather like Joshua's tour around Jericho, postcolonialism has the potential to bring the hermeneutical walls tumbling down, and yet at the same time it might also enable a theological rebuilding in a new and different configuration. In this process, an important question is whether postcolonial criticism is too hot to handle for the theological community. Like other radical, theoretical approaches such as cultural studies, postmodernism, and feminism, postcolonialism runs the danger of either becoming obsessed with theory or of being a vaguely fashionable way of mentioning empire. In either case, the result may be irrelevance and domestication.

The *Festschrift* style of academic writing is one of the few places where these sorts of questions can be addressed. It allows positive engagement with the scholarship of the person being honoured, a rather more informal style than is customary,¹ and speculation as to where the future might lie. The last of these, the future of theological thought, is a crucial matter. Writing from a British/European perspective and at the risk of some generalization, it is arguable that theology is largely moribund. Publishers' print runs for most serious theology are increasingly in the hundreds and not the thousands, let alone the tens of thousands needed to reach the bestseller lists.² The only religious book which engaged public intellectual discussion in the last year (2008) was that of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, on Dostoevsky, which was, not unexpectedly, suitably opaque to a general readership (see Williams 2008). Perhaps, from a postcolonial

1. See, for example, Hooker and Hickling 1975. This is a *Festschrift* for the British New Testament scholar Christopher Evans, and contains an affectionate letter written by the contributors instead of a traditional preface to the volume.

2. I have drawn attention to this at more length elsewhere; see Broadbent 2008.

perspective, all of this is no coincidence. In its imperial pomp, Europe was the theological powerhouse for (Christian) theology. Now, the centre seems to be increasingly located in the current imperial superpower, the United States. Whether this current centre will in due course be superseded or complemented by India and China remains to be seen. One might well agree here with Sugirtharajah's own observation that 'Mainstream biblical scholarship will become increasingly technical and obscure, and will interest only a small group of insiders.... In a culture that is becoming increasingly multicultural and poly-religious, engaging with one sacred text, as mainstream scholars tend to do, will further alienate and isolate them' (Sugirtharajah 2006b: 495). In this changing culture, it is necessary to ask what postcolonialism contributes to the picture and it is to this that we now turn.

R.S. Sugirtharajah and Postcolonialism

If Warren Buffet is known as 'the Sage of Omaha' (the current financial crisis notwithstanding), it would not be inappropriate to describe R.S. Sugirtharajah as 'the Sage of Postcolonialism'. He has rightly been described as the 'founding father' of postcolonialism within theological circles. A glance at a library catalogue will show his work ranging over a wide section of theological disciplines, including missiology, biblical studies, third world theologies, marginal voices and, of course, postcolonialism. From this array, I want to draw attention to just some of Sugirtharajah's insights which help to give a taste of both the wide range of postcolonial insights and the 'dangers' (and opportunities) it might present to established theological practices and positions.

Earlier in his career, Sugirtharajah wrote on liberation/third world approaches to the Bible. Liberation theology has, in ecclesiastical circles, been seen as a radical way of doing theology. Its proponents, especially those within the Roman Catholic tradition, have been subject to various investigations by the doctrinal authorities. Looking back, despite the fears of the religious authorities, Sugirtharajah sees that some liberation theologies were not as radical as the doctrinal watchdogs had feared.

When it emerged, liberation theology gave the impression that it was going to be a great force in altering the way we do theology itself, and in ushering in an era of radical changes. Sadly these failed to materialize. In its interpretive proposals, liberation hermeneutics continued to be conservative. In its appropriation of the Bible, in its expositions, in its obsession with Christ-centred hermeneutics, it remained within conventional patterns.... It did not engage in an overall reappraisal of, nor did it desire, a reconfiguration of the basic theological concepts.... Instead of being a new agent in the ongoing work of God, liberation hermeneutics has ended up reflecting upon the theme of biblical liberation rather than being a liberative hermeneutics (Sugirtharajah 2001: 242-43).

In reality, Sugirtharajah sees liberation theology as essentially conservative:

[T]he project of liberation remains within the bounds of Christianity and its construction is informed by Christian sources. Liberation hermeneutics sees liberation as something lodged and located in biblical texts, or in ecumenical and Christian Church documents, and something which can be extracted from these textualized records (Sugirtharajah 2001: 261).

Essentially, the target of liberation hermeneutics remains 'that of evangelizing the poor' (Sugirtharajah 2002: 71).

Postcolonial criticism, on the other hand, offers a wider perspective.

Postcolonialism's critical procedure is an amalgam of different methods ranging from the now unfashionable form-criticism to contemporary literary methods. It is interdisciplinary in nature and pluralistic in its outlook. It is more an avenue of inquiry than a homogeneous project. One of the significant aspects of postcolonialism is its theoretical and intellectual catholicism. It thrives on inclusiveness, and it is attracted to all kinds of tools and disciplinary fields, as long as they probe injustices, produce new knowledge which problematizes well-entrenched positions and enhance the lives of the marginalized (Sugirtharajah 2001: 258).

This perspective also moves beyond the narrow confines of a particular religious tradition:

Postcolonial space refuses to press for a particular religious stance as final and ultimate. As a point of entry, individual interpreters may have their own theological, confessional and denominational stance, but this in itself does not preclude them from inquiring into and entertaining a variety of religious truth-claims. It is the multi-disciplinary nature of the enterprise which gives postcolonialism its energy. It sees revelation as an ongoing process which embraces not only the Bible, tradition, and the Church but also other sacred texts and contemporary secular events. (Sugirtharajah 2001: 262)

Postcolonial reading challenges pre-existing power structures:

[I]t instigates and creates possibilities, and provides a platform for the widest possible convergence of critical forces, of multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multicultural voices, to assert their denied rights and rattle the centre (Sugirtharajah 2002: 13).

Postcolonial reading problematizes the Bible. The Bible has become the problem rather than the solution. At the end of one of his volumes, Sugirtharajah writes as follows:

Scriptures are only pointers and not an end in themselves. Texts, dogmas, and creeds are not the only access to reality. I end with a quotation from a text which advocates both embracement and eventual abandonment, attachment and detachment from text. It comes from an ancient Indian

text, *The Upanishads*. It contains this apparently sacrilegious thought: 'Read, study and ceaselessly ponder the Scriptures; but once the light has shined within you, throw them away as you discard a brand which you have used to light your fire' (*Amritanada Upanishad* 1) (Sugirtharajah 2002: 207).

Postcolonialism and the New Testament

The themes outlined above are developed further in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, which brought together a variety of scholars to apply postcolonial theory to the New Testament writings (Segovia and Sugirtharajah 2007). Again, this volume is rich and complex in its ideas, focussing especially on the varied interactions between the Roman Empire and the early Christian communities. So I will just give a few examples to show the radical and challenging nature of the postcolonial project.

Warren Carter, writing on Matthew's Gospel, rightly notes the complex nature of the interaction between empire and church community. Because of these multifaceted interactions,

...the Gospel's theological formulations in areas such as theology, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology and eschatology are influenced by the imperial world, while shaping the Gospel's own imperial-imitating system of dominating power and sovereignty. The Gospel is a product of imperial power and productive of its own imperial system of power (Carter 2007: 72–73).

Thus, Jesus' kingdom uses imperial ways and means in its operation.

Like Rome's mission, it employs the same image of empire (10.1), comes with the same price of recognizing God's all-embracing sovereignty that does not tolerate dissent (10.13–15, 32), and labels its enemies in negative terms (10.17–18) (Carter 2007: 85).

Carter realizes, of course, that 'Matthew is an oppositional text' (2007: 72) and that, as Homi Bhabha has noted, its 'counter-imperial mimicry leads to mockery of, and menace to, imperial power, hence Jesus' crucifixion' (2007: 99).

But it also replicates the imperial project. The final verses of the Gospel, which attribute all authority to Jesus, mean that the Gospel 'mirrors and replaces one system of absolute authority with another' and that God will initiate a 'violent, eschatological victory [to be] forcibly imposed with Jesus' return' (2007: 97, 99).

Similar themes are developed by Tat-siong Benny Liew in his commentary on Mark's Gospel. In a section on 'Authority', Liew writes that the images developed in the Gospel around the parousia mean that:

...by defeating power with more power, Mark is, in the final analysis, no different from the 'might-is-right' ideology that has led to colonialism, imperialism and various forms of suffering and oppression. Mark's Jesus may have replaced the 'wicked' Jewish-Roman power, but the tyrannical, exclusionary and coercive politics goes on (2007: 117).

Liew's two other main sections are on 'Agency' and 'Gender'. In the former, Liew notes that human beings have no 'original agency or original autonomy, except the choice to serve either of the true actors of history: God and Satan', they remain 'objects instead of subjects of agency' (2007: 123). In the latter section, Liew is equally pessimistic, because in the Gospel 'patriarchy never dies; women will only be subjects at home and will always be subjected to the men and the needs of the family' (2007: 128).

But it is not only the Gospel accounts that are problematic from a post-colonial perspective. The same applies to the epistles. Jennifer Bird, writing on the letter to the Ephesians says that in the 'process of the exaltation of Christ, Jesus loses that which made him human, and his followers are simply trading in one ruler for another!' (Bird 2007: 266). The epistle is in fact an imperial propaganda exercise:

The point of political propaganda was to engender devotion to the Roman emperor's agenda by extolling his benefactions and creating a sense of unity and like-mindedness. Ephesians mimics political propaganda, painting a picture of a new heavenly empire, ruled by a king whose right-hand man, his servant, has conquered all powers, rulers and authorities of this age. The act of committing to writing such religious claims, imbued with imperial terminology, is one of desire to control and to engender conformity within the heavenly empire (Bird 2007: 273).

In her conclusion, Bird writes, simply but devastatingly, that for the Ephesians, 'in order for their counter-empire to make any sense, the earthly empire must be maintained' (2007: 278).

Sugirtharajah, writing on the Johannine epistles, picks out in some detail the colonial characteristics of the letters. One of the main characteristics of colonial discourse is its rejection of dissident voices.

Colonial discourse is staunchly wedded to unvarying and exclusive truth and tolerates no dissent or debate. To the regret of the author of these epistles/letters, the majority seem to have gone over to the opposite camp: 'They are of the world, and therefore what they say is of the world, and the world listens to them' (1 Jn 4.5). The epistles exhibit intolerance of this sort of situation and detest any theological contradiction (Sugirtharajah 2007: 413).

Sugirtharajah goes on to look in some detail at the hermeneutical strategies employed in the letters: the author's claim to have been an eyewitness; the claim that the message is authentic; conferring the elected role of being

God's people to those who receive the message, thus reducing the possibility of dissent; the projection of an imperial Christ; the banning of customary hospitality to any travelling preachers who disagree with the author's theological position (2007: 414-16).

There is also a section dealing with the influence of Buddhism on Johannine thought. Sugirtharajah notes that in their interpretative strategies, Western scholars rarely look beyond Greek and Hebrew thought. Yet it is recognized that contact between India and the Mediterranean world was continuous, 'and it is being increasingly acknowledged that Buddhist and Christian ideas were exposed to one another. Traces of Buddhism in some of the apocalyptic literature and in the Gnostic writings, especially in Basilides, have long been recognized'. In the Johannine letters, Buddhist thought is reflected in the 'idea of God', the 'doctrine of indwelling' and the concept of *maitri*, loving kindness which is to be shown to all regardless of 'ethnic, caste or religious distinction' (Sugirtharajah 2007: 418-21).

The brief examples above help to show what a radical challenge post-colonialism presents to religious fundamentalism and bigotry. Among the points made: (1) it takes a multifaith and multicultural perspective, refusing to allow one particular religious tradition the final word; (2) it openly challenges religious power by pointing to the parallels between the exercise of religious authority and imperial power; (3) authoritative religious texts are problematized as violent and intolerant propaganda and their authority questioned; (4) other texts, both religious and secular, are seen as conveying truth; (5) suppressed dissident voices are recovered; (6) Christianity is shown to be influenced by non-Christian faiths and is thereby relativized; (7) the message of the Christian faith, despite having some anti-imperial aspects, is shown to be a mirror reflection of the violent Roman empire and perhaps in need of some form of opposing secular (or spiritual/satanic) empire for its own self-understanding or expression; and (8) the figure of Jesus, who ended his life on a Roman cross, is converted into an imperial figure who will return in power and glory, or to put it another way, bringing death and vengeance.

While the above points are largely contextualized for a Christian perspective, they could also, with adjustment, be applied to any religious tradition as tools of interrogation. The important question is whether postcolonialism will have an impact, in the theological world beyond the narrow confines of biblical studies but also in the wider cultural and intellectual milieu.

Postcolonialism in a Wider Setting

By and large, in a theological context, postcolonialism has been most prominent within biblical studies. In some ways this is unsurprising, as biblical scholarship has, over the last couple of centuries, tended to take a more

questioning approach than other theological disciplines. One need only mention the works of Reimarus, Strauss, and more recently, Dibelius and Bultmann to send a shiver down the spine of the orthodox. In some ways, biblical studies was a tolerated aberration. A look back over the history of interpretation shows the attitude taken by the ecclesiastical authorities with regard to the biblical studies project. Saying or writing nothing was to be preferred, but if anything was to be called into question, it should be something obscure in the Hebrew scriptures. If the New Testament was to be questioned, then would scholars please question the epistles and not the Gospels. Only as a last resort should the historicity of the Gospels be discussed. The other favoured option was not to publish anything 'radical' in the vernacular. In the mid-nineteenth century, Henry Alford, the Dean of Canterbury, published his four-volume commentary on the whole of the New Testament. This was among the first of what modern scholars would recognize as a proper critical commentary in English. While it had shortcomings and mistakes, it brought for the first time a great deal of critical German scholarship to a wider British public and was a huge success, in reality a bestseller. It was, however, attacked. The liberal *Edinburgh Review* regretted that 'all these momentous topics are discussed in the vernacular language [and] we almost regret that practical discretion did not sufficiently operate with him to clothe his remarks in a Latin garb'.³ The more conservative *Quarterly Review* was still attacking the fourth edition of 1859 in 1863.⁴

Given the questioning approach of some biblical scholarship, it is perhaps not surprising that a radical discipline such as postcolonialism has been linked with biblical studies. But will this affect anything in the theological firmament? In some ways, it is too soon to say. We will have to see how far the insights contained in the field percolate out into wider spheres. There is some evidence that it is making an impression. Within biblical studies itself, there is an increasing range of publications. In the 'secular' sphere, the second edition of the ubiquitous *Post-Colonial Studies Reader* has a new section on 'The Sacred'. There is also anecdotal evidence that it is having an impact: sessions at the *Society of Biblical Literature*, and interest from students wanting to pursue research in the field. But there are also possibilities that postcolonialism could remain fixed in a corner of biblical studies. Firstly, as mentioned above, biblical studies as a discipline is dangerously arcane and postcolonialism has the potential to make it even more so. Someone with a non-theological background recently browsed around my study and remarked (without any malice): 'Do people really write books about this sort of stuff?' Secondly, the discipline of biblical studies within

3. 'The Greek Text of the New Testament', *Edinburgh Review* 94 (July 1851): 2. To modern eyes, Alford may seem to have more than enough Latin.

4. 'New Testament', *Quarterly Review* 113 (January 1863): 95-138.

wider theology is interesting. In some ways, biblical studies could be seen as theology's 'court jester'. Like the jester in a secular court, it can say things that need to be said and act as some sort of safety valve as long as it presents no real threat to the power structures in place. Like a troublesome child, biblical studies can be patted on the head and then quietly ignored. One example of this would be Benedict XVI's recent *Jesus of Nazareth* (2007). As Gerd Lüdemann points out, the volume more or less ignores the last two hundred years of scholarship (Lüdemann 2008). It is, I think, possible to argue that it is only when postcolonialism moves away from the narrow purview of the scriptures and begins to engage more widely that its full impact will be realized.

Postcolonialism... Where Next?

But where might this journey go? Much of the present literature is centred on the New Testament and there is clearly further work to be done in that area. There are also some writings which interact with parts of the Hebrew scriptures. Sugirtharajah's *Postcolonial Biblical Reader* has some examples of this in the essays by Dube, Donaldson, Chia and Latvus (2006a). There is Keith Whitelam's *The Invention of Ancient Israel*, written from a Saidian perspective, which argues, not without controversy, that ancient Israel had been invented by scholars in the image of a European nation state (1996). There is as yet no equivalent for the Hebrew scriptures of the New Testament's *Postcolonial Commentary*. It would be an obvious next step to take, though the complexity and size of such a project would require a not inconsiderable amount of time and effort. There would, however, be the opportunity to follow the interactions with imperial formations different from Rome. Another project in this arena would be to examine Qumran from a postcolonial perspective.

As indicated above, however, it is arguable that it is only when the post-colonial project begins to move beyond the comparatively narrow confines of biblical studies that its full significance will be drawn to the attention of a wider audience. That is to say, when it begins to trouble centres of power. This is most likely to happen when cherished doctrinal positions are placed under the postcolonial microscope with an examination of the doctrinally formative early centuries of Christian history, particularly the period from circa 100 CE, via the 'conversion' of Constantine, to the Council of Nicaea (325 CE). It was during this period that what has sometimes been termed 'proto-orthodoxy' was forged and started to win power. But from a postcolonial viewpoint, suspicion should be the first reaction to any formation of power, especially within an imperial context.

The field is a complex one. Church historians have noted that the second and third centuries have comparatively few primary resources and that 'the

developments in Christianity during this time are rather multidirectional and not easily mapped' (Siker 2000: 232). This difficulty has not prevented historians from attempting to draw the map of these early centuries. The controlling paradigm of this mapping was often the inevitable missionary success of Christianity. So, for example, Frend's classic *The Rise of Christianity* has phrases such as 'all the while, the church was advancing' (1984: 128); the 'church's destiny was gradually to move out of its Jewish environment into the pagan world, and... to conquer it' (1984: 164); and by 'c. 100, "normative Christianity" was beginning to emerge as a distinct religion within the general cultural framework of Hellenistic Judaism' (1984: 137). This paradigm has not gone unchallenged in recent times. Slowly, the complexities of these first centuries are being uncovered. Pagels and King in their volume on the Gospel of Judas note the importance of other voices within this period which have been negatively characterized as either gnostic or heretical (2007). The complexities of Nag Hammadi are only just beginning to be addressed. Likewise, issues of gender in this period are also being tackled by volumes such as Jane Schaberg's *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene* (2002). What is clearly beginning to break down is the old-fashioned distinction between the false opposites of orthodoxy and heresy. Slowly, the history of these early centuries is being seen as a rainbow coalition of religious communities inspired, in some way or other, by the figure of Jesus/Christ rather than the steady march of orthodoxy. Spivak's silenced subalterns are slowly beginning to make their voices heard.

Postcolonialism presents the opportunity to interrogate this period of history in more detail. As Edward Said put it in an interview:

I've always been interested in what get left out.... That's why I'm interested in Raymond Williams's discussion of the country house poems, where the representation of the country house necessarily excludes the silence of the peasants who have been driven off the land; or the fields that have been manicured to produce the beautiful spaces that Jane Austen exploits in her novels, where livelihood is transformed into property. I'm interested in the tension between what is represented and what isn't represented, between the articulate and the silent. For me, it has a very particular background in the questioning of the document. What does the document include? What doesn't it include? (2000: 424).

Said's reference to Raymond Williams serves as a reminder of postcolonialism's debt, in my view often under-acknowledged, to strands of cultural studies. As well as Williams's 'structures of feeling', E.P. Thompson's important attention to history from below should not be overlooked. His famous reference to how history has been read and written seems to have had little impact on ecclesiastical historians. Frend writes of Roman cities with their wealth and power living off the countryside and 'off the backs of the peasants' and that, in North Africa, the 'terms of tenure offered to native

farmers by the authorities were not ungenerous' (Frend 1984: 166). Yet he makes nothing of these observations about these lower classes. Postcolonialism has made us suspicious of such lacunae. As Thompson famously wrote:

[H]istory [has been read]... in the light of subsequent preoccupations, and not as in fact it occurred. Only the successful... are remembered. The blind alleys, the lost causes, and the losers themselves are forgotten. I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper... from the enormous condescension of posterity.... Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience (1980: 12).

With suitable emendation, Thompson's quote could be applied to these early Christian centuries.

Some of the complexities relating to the interaction of class, gender, protest and so forth can be found in the Montanist movement. The church historian, Henry Chadwick, gives an outline of this complex movement (2001). It was a village-based movement starting in Phrygia (Asia Minor) in the second half of the second century. It was based on ecstatic prophecy and the end of the world was expected soon and the new Jerusalem was to descend from heaven, not in Palestine, but in Phrygia. As well as Montanus, two women were prominent in the movement, Prisca and Maximilla. The movement was very active and it spread throughout the empire reaching Rome, Lyon, and Carthage among other cities. Now the details of all this are for another occasion. What I want to draw attention to is how Chadwick writes about the movement. The two women leaders 'abandoned their husbands' (Chadwick 2001: 114). That is, intentionally or not, a sexist statement. Had it been men involved, the text would doubtless have either made no comment on the matter or would have used a phrase such as 'leaving their homes'. Nor may the Montanists be seen as a protest movement of one sort or another. They 'are misrepresented if they are interpreted as protesting against order or a pastoral ministry in apostolic continuity or against church finances based on endowments' (Chadwick 2001: 117). Chadwick does allow that 'it is very possible that Phrygian villagers and peasants did not feel quite integrated in the largely urban structure of a Church with episcopal authority located in the empire's towns' (2001: 117). What remains unaddressed here are the questions which interest postcolonialism. Why did this movement start among the poor? Why may it not be seen as a protest movement? Which empire, ecclesiastical or Roman or both, was it protesting against? What was the role of women within this movement? What propaganda did 'orthodox' writers use against it? Answers to some of these questions are found in the recent detailed study by William Tabbernee (2007). For example, women were appointed bishops, priests, and deacons (Tabbernee 2007: 423). Other questions, however, remain to be addressed from a postcolonial perspective.

The Manichaean movement provides another possibility for further exploration from a postcolonial perspective. Mani was born and worked from within the Persian empire, founding his community around 240 CE during the reign of Shapur I. Mani saw himself as the perfection and fulfilment of three religions, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity. In his complex religious system, elements from each of these faiths are brought together in what might be termed a hybrid faith. It is often difficult to tell the exact origin of different doctrines. Thus, scholars are divided whether the doctrine of rebirth is of Indian or Hellenistic origin (Gardner and Lieu 2004: 19). Likewise, the textual history of Manichaean writings is tortuous, both linguistically and in the history of the various manuscripts. However, from a postcolonial perspective there may be possibilities for further exploration.

Widening the discussion further, it is clear that a postcolonial perspective, applied to areas such as the apocryphal writings to the various movements—sometimes, but not always—emanating from the imperial fringes will reveal a rather different history for these early centuries. The story could well be taken on into the post-Nicene period for further analysis. However the history might be written, there are numerous questions around the complex interaction between those representing the ‘orthodox’ and the empire. What were the class and gender biases of the ‘Church Fathers’ and what weapons did they borrow from the imperial armoury to fight off the ‘heretical’? How did imperial ideology affect the development of christology beyond the New Testament period, bearing in mind the comments in the *Postcolonial Commentary*? What role did liturgy play in this complex ideological dance? How did the increasingly centralized monarchical episcopate interact with imperial patterns of power and governance? What role did the formation of a New Testament canon play in this process? We are moving here beyond the ‘court jester’ stage into the more dangerous waters of ‘doctrinal orthodoxy’ and those who read these essays will be only too well aware of the dangers lying in wait. There is clearly much work to be done.

Conclusion

In the title of this contribution, I asked whether a postcolonial future would be one step beyond our present theology or one step too far. Unsurprisingly, the answer is a hybrid one. It will be clear, I think, that postcolonialism is taking biblical scholarship into new and exciting areas and raises new possibilities for thinking about the Bible. By stepping beyond the arena of biblical scholarship, it also presents the possibility of seeing the early centuries of Christianity in new and different ways. In both areas, it asks new and challenging questions. There is no doubt, however, that for some this will be a step too far. It relativizes religious truth claims and challenges the

authority of religious power centres. It raises questions regarding christology and ecclesiastical power. As the person whom we honour in this volume once remarked, 'How do you have a Christianity in a culture where there is no concept of being ruled by a king?'

These questions are not simply for the Judaeo-Christian tradition. They are also a challenge to other faith traditions. But if these challenges can be faced by all religious traditions, then intriguing possibilities emerge. What would be the shape of postcolonial theologies, both globally and locally? What sort of theological imagery might be either salvaged or constructed? It is, perhaps, far too soon to tell. But postcolonialism is, in my view, one of the few ideological constructions able to tackle the task with its ability to take in multi-faceted questions and sources. Whatever challenges the bigoted, imperializing fundamentalists of any faith and helps individuals and communities to live alongside each other has to have something going for it. So might postcolonialism be a step too far? The answer is almost certainly, but it is a step worth taking.

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Part III

EMERGENT INTERVENTIONS

CAN WE READ RELIGIOUS TEXTS INTERRELIGIOUSLY? POSSIBILITIES, CHALLENGES, AND EXPERIMENTS

Peter C. Phan

Professor R.S. Sugirtharajah has gained international recognition for his prolific writings on postcolonial hermeneutics. Part of his postcolonial hermeneutics is to challenge the hegemony of the Christian Bible as the exclusive and privileged repository of God's self-revelation, and by implication, to valorize the sacred writings of other religious traditions as expressions of divine self-disclosure (1998; 2001). The intent of my essay is to explore further what has been initiated by Sugirtharajah's hermeneutical project, namely, the task of reading sacred texts interreligiously.¹

The fact that the title of my essay is phrased as a question indicates the tentative, and in some quarters, controversial nature of my following reflections. It is important to understand the reason for their tentativeness. In a certain respect, reading and studying religious texts other than those of one's own religious tradition is nothing new or startling. Scholars of comparative religion and even Western theologians have been doing this for centuries, of course for various purposes and with different methods. Today, college students in departments of religious studies routinely study the scriptures of various religions. What is novel and may raise ecclesiastical eyebrows is that there are Christians—and they are some of the folks that fill the pews on Sunday mornings and their number seems to be increasing—who read the scriptures of other religions as *sacred scripture*, and not merely as literary, historical, philosophical, and theological documents.

Today rare indeed is a Christian congregation or parish in which there are not a few members who have not participated in some kind of interfaith worship during which the scriptures of non-Christian religions are read, various meditation techniques practiced, and prayers of different religious traditions recited. Church leaders are often at a loss about what to say to Christians who claim that their spiritual life has been challenged, corrected,

1. The main contents of this essay were presented at the Epiphany West Conference January 29–February 1, 2008 at the Episcopal Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, California, USA. The title of the conference was 'Sacred Texts as Window: Seeing Ourselves Through the Eyes of Another'.

and enriched by, let's say, the Hindu *Bhagavad Gītā*, the Buddhist *Dhammapada* or *Lotus Sutra*, the Confucian *Analects*, the Daoist *Daodejing*, the Sikh *Adi Granth*, or the Muslim Qur'an. They may issue a stern warning against syncretism and a possible loss of faith or, on the contrary, they may commend this practice of interreligious reading as a source of intellectual and spiritual enrichment. That a straightforward and ecclesiastically approved answer to this question is not readily available intimates the complexity of the issue, and hence, the tentative and provisional nature of any answer—including mine—to it.

While reading religious texts interreligiously—that is, reading the religious scriptures of other religions as *sacred texts* for oneself—is today not an unknown or even rare phenomenon among Christians, it is nevertheless not theologically unproblematic. A host of complex and varied issues are implicated by it. For instance, theologically, what doctrinal assertions are presupposed in accepting non-Christian writings as sacred scripture? Ecclesiastically, how does one account for what seems to be a case of multiple religious belonging and syncretism? Spiritually, how can one use non-Christian texts for meditation, prayer, and guidance, especially if they reflect a non-theistic or polytheistic belief system? Hermeneutically, what is involved in the act of reading a sacred text of religions other than one's own? In what follows I will take up for consideration some of the issues contained in each of the four questions raised above regarding the theology, ecclesiology, spirituality, and hermeneutics of reading religious texts interreligiously. What are the possibilities, challenges, and methods of reading of religious texts interreligiously? My perspective in tackling these questions is of course that of a Christian, and more specifically, a Roman Catholic. Non-Catholic Christians and non-Christians may or may not find reading sacred writings of other religions as scripture for themselves problematic, and if they do, they will no doubt approach the issue quite differently and arrive at divergent conclusions than I.

Non-Christian Scriptures as Divine Revelation?

Among the many theological questions raised by the practice of reading religious texts interreligiously, from the Christian point of view, that of the scriptural status of these writings as depositories of divine revelation is perhaps the most salient and also the most complex.²

2. Here by 'scripture' is meant the *written* text of the sacred words (the 'Holy Writ'), though in several religious traditions (e.g. Hinduism and Islam) their oral form still remains primary, and hence hearing them takes precedence over reading them. Moreover, even the written text acquires revelatory and transformative power only when it is recited orally and listened to, in public rituals or in private devotion. Supernatural power is attributed even to the sound of the sacred word (like the sound OM).

For Christians, at least for those for whom the Bible is, in the words of the Evangelical theologian Tim Perry, a ‘divinely inspired and is therefore the necessary, sufficient, clear and authoritative guide for theological construction’ (2006: 17)³ and I might add, Christian living, the scriptures of other religions, except the Hebrew *Tanakh* that makes up parts of the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, are at best irrelevant and unnecessary. If the Bible already contains all the ‘necessary, sufficient, clear and authoritative’ teaching, why should Christians bother reading, let’s say, the *Dhammapada* or the Qur’an as something to learn from?

Worse than redundant and irrelevant, non-Christian scriptures were also regarded by not a few Christians as the work of the devil himself, full of lies and errors, immoral tales of the gods’ sexual adventures, and other perversities, and therefore should be burnt rather than perused. The Qur’an, to cite the title of Frederick Quinn’s latest book about the image of Islam in the West, was regarded as *The Sum of Heresies* (2007).⁴ Should one ever read these ‘pagan’ texts, one must do so with apologetic purposes, as past missionaries, with very few exceptions, were wont to doing, in order to refute their errors and to demonstrate the absolute superiority and the truth of the Bible.

It is proper to note here the ambiguous and polyvalent meanings of the term *scripture* (*graphē* in Greek, *ketav* in Hebrew) and its various Indo-European semantic cognates. Other terms are used to refer to sacred writings: *gramma* (Greek, plural *grammata*), *littera* (Latin, plural *litterae*), or books: *biblos* (Greek, plural *bibloi*) or the diminutive *biblion* (Greek, plural *biblia*), *biblia* (Latin, originally neuter plural, then later, feminine singular). In his magisterial work *What Is Scripture?: A Comparative Approach*, Wilfred Cantwell Smith points out that the use of the term *scripture(s)* to refer to sacred book(s) is highly complex and ambiguous (1993). When Christianity was the dominant religion in the Mediterranean, *scripture(s)* is used as a proper-noun designation to refer specifically to the Christian Bible. Later, the term is extended to refer to the scriptures of other religions, as when Peter the Venerable (d. 1156) speaks of the Qur’an as *nefaria scriptura* in his *Summa totius haeresis saracenorum*. The Qur’an itself uses the term *scripture* (*kitāb*) in a generic sense when it calls Jews and Christians ‘people of scripture’ (*ahl al-kitāb*). In 1879, when the translation of the sacred texts of Asian religions was undertaken, the series was called *The Sacred Books of the East*, thereby explicitly recognizing that there are holy and authoritative books or scriptures in religions other than the Bible and that they function ‘scripturally’, in a way analogously to the Hebrew and Christian Bible. See also Graham 2005. I will come back to the theological significance of this shift from *scripture* designating something specific (i.e. The Christian Bible) to designating something generic (i.e. the sacred texts of all religions).

3. Of course, any Evangelical theologian could have been cited, but Tim Perry’s words seem to be especially apposite since he is one of the few Evangelicals who are open to the other two sources of theology, namely, reason and tradition, and who do not adhere to the principle of *sola scriptura*.

4. Recall Peter the Venerable’s designation of the Qur’an as *nefaria scriptura*.

Today, of course, condemnation of non-Christian scriptures is no longer common. As shelves of these texts in Western-languages translations in even secular bookstores readily attest, there has been a noticeable appreciation of them as fountain of wisdom and source of spirituality. But even with this increasing esteem of non-Christian texts, there still remains a fundamental question, so far not adequately considered, which conditions the very possibility of reading religious texts interreligiously. The question is: What scriptural, or more generally, theological status, from the Christian point of view, can be attributed to non-Christian texts? The qualification, 'from the Christian point of view', is deliberate to highlight the precise import of the question, namely, how *Christians* should evaluate the nature of these non-Christian texts. That these scriptures—be they the *Vedas*, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the *Tripitaka*, the *Avesta*, the *Adi Granth*, or the Qur'an—are for their adherents sacred, inspired, revelatory, and therefore contain a divine (or in non-theistic religions, transcendent) teaching that has been heard (*sruti*) or remembered (*smirti*), is beyond doubt. The question here is whether in reading these religious texts interreligiously Christians may regard them as divine revelation for themselves, and thus something analogous to the Bible.

It may be objected at once that applying the Christian concept of 'divine revelation' or 'Bible' to the scriptures of other religions is a category mistake. The point is well taken, partly because not all texts that have important cultural, social, and often even religious functions are regarded as having a divine origin by the very people for whom they function as normative classics. For example, the Confucian five 'classics' (*jing*) and four 'books' (*shu*), though of immense importance in traditional Chinese culture, are not attributed divine authorship, in the way the *Tanakh*, the Bible, and the Qur'an are. More importantly, as Smith has argued, '*scripture is a human activity*' (1993: 18). By this he means that 'no text is scripture in itself and as such. People—a given community—make a text into scripture, or keep it scripture: by treating it in a certain way' (Smith 1993: 18). As Graham has correctly pointed out, 'neither form nor content can serve to identify or to distinguish scripture as a general phenomenon.... A text, written, oral, or both, is only 'scripture' insofar as a group of persons perceives it to be sacred or holy, powerful or meaningful, possessed of an exalted authority, and in some fashion transcendent of, and hence distinct from, other speech and writing' (2005: 8195).

An important corollary follows from the fact that there are a variety of ways in which texts are considered scripture even though they are not believed to be of divine origin and that their scriptural status is created by the particular communities in which they function as sacred scripture. That is, it is not logically possible for Christians to judge whether the texts which other religions accept as sacred scripture are objectively of divine origin and hence to convey divine revelation or not. Because the holiness or

sacredness of a book is not an a priori, ontological attribute or the characteristic of a particular literary genre but is a contextual and relational quality that the book acquires vis-à-vis a particular religious community, the only thing Christian officials are entitled to do is to declare that though non-Christian scriptures function as sacred texts to non-Christians, they must not be called 'inspired texts', much less be allowed to function as such for Christians.

This is in fact what the 2000 Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus*, has done. On the basis of the Christian belief that divine revelation attains 'fullness' and 'definitiveness' in Jesus Christ, the Declaration draws a distinction between the 'theological faith' of Christians and the 'belief' in other religions which is, according to the Declaration, only a 'religious experience still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking assent to God who reveals himself' (7).⁵ With regard to the scriptural status of non-Christian scriptures, the Declaration says:

The hypothesis of the inspired value of the sacred writings of other religions is also put forward. Certainly, it must be recognized that there are some elements in these texts which may be *de facto* instruments by which countless people throughout the centuries have been and still are able today to nourish and maintain their life-relationship with God.... The Church's tradition, however, reserves the designation of *inspired texts* to the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, since these are inspired by the Holy Spirit (*DI*, 8).⁶

The Declaration goes on to assert that whatever 'elements of goodness and grace' these non-Christian sacred writings may possess, 'which in actual fact direct and nourish the existence of their followers', they 'receive from the mystery of Christ' (*DI*, 8).

Dominus Iesus makes several theological assertions in these statements. First, it recognizes that non-Christian texts do contain 'some elements' of truth and grace that have been of help in nourishing non-Christians' relationship to God, even though, the Declaration hastens to add, non-Christian religions contain 'gaps, insufficiencies and errors'.⁷ But, and this is its

5. The English text of *Dominus Iesus* (*DI*) is available in Pope and Hefling, 2002. The reference is to the number of the paragraph of the document. It is to be noted that Vatican II's decree, *Nostra Aetate*, uses the word 'faith' (*fides islamica*) and not belief (no. 3) to speak of the faith of the Muslim.

6. The hypothesis of the inspired value of non-Christian sacred writings the Declaration refers to has been put forward by some Indian theologians who suggest that these writings can be regarded as analogous to the Old Testament.

7. The Declaration quotes from John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris missio* (1991): 55. The question here is whether Christianity, and not just individual Christians, throughout its history has not contained 'gaps, insufficiencies and error', both in its teachings and in its moral practices. The answer to this question can of course be answered only empirically, and not dogmatically.

second important point, it refuses them the appellation of ‘inspired texts’ since this term is reserved by the church’s tradition to the Christian Bible insofar as it is ‘inspired by the Holy Spirit’ (*DI*, 8). Third, the Declaration implicitly denies that these texts function as scripture in non-Christian religions. Sure, they may contain some elements of truth and goodness, which they are said to derive from Christ, but they are not viewed as functioning as scripture for non-Christians as the Bible does for Christians. The theological reason for the Declaration’s refusal to see these texts as scripture either for Christians or for non-Christians is that, in its view, divine revelation has been exclusively given in Christ and the church, and therefore only the books that transmit this revelation—the Christian Bible—deserve to be called ‘inspired texts’ or sacred scripture. Clearly, then, for *Dominus Iesus*, there is no possibility of reading religious texts interreligiously, simply because there are no non-Christian inspired or scriptural texts to begin with.

I have dwelt at some length on *Dominus Iesus*’ position toward non-Christian religious texts, which may not be exclusive of Roman Catholic official teaching, because in principle it undercuts the possibility of the practice of reading religious texts interreligiously. The critical question of course is whether *Dominus Iesus* is on solid ground in denying the scriptural quality to non-Christian religious texts. Of course, church officials are within their right to say that the Bible is scripture for Christians since this is how the Christian community has created this function for those books which it eventually included into the canon of the Bible.⁸ As Smith has correctly observed, ‘scripture is a human activity’. But it is on shaky ground when it denies the scriptural quality of non-Christian sacred texts in non-Christian religions since historically these communities have endowed them with such scriptural quality and since these texts have, in fact, played and continue to play the role of scripture for these communities.

Furthermore, *Dominus Iesus* is also on shaky ground when it implies that non-Christian scriptures cannot in principle function as scripture for Christians because they are not inspired by the Holy Spirit. The reason for this is that Christians are given to know where the Holy Spirit is active but not where the Holy Spirit is not active, except where there are errors and sins. But it is of course absurd to say that non-Christian scriptures contain nothing but errors and sins. Thus Christians can say that their Bible is inspired by

8. It is to be noted that I am not asserting that revelation is created by the religious community. On the contrary, it is always a divine activity. Rather, I am saying that a text does not become and function as scripture (and consequently ‘inspired’ and ‘canonical’) unless the community accepts it as such and allows it to function as such. ‘Scripture’ is essentially a relational concept and is the result of the community’s tendency to ‘scripturalize’, to use Smith’s term.

the Holy Spirit but cannot affirm a priori and with absolute certainty that non-Christian scriptures are not inspired by the same Holy Spirit.

Conversely, if a Christian has experienced that certain non-Christian scriptures are carriers of divine revelation and function as a source of wisdom and spiritual edification, and hence are scripture for him or her, it is incumbent upon her or him to develop a theology of revelation that can justify the assertion that there is divine revelation outside the Bible.

This theology of revelation is of course part of a theology of religion that is neither exclusivistic nor inclusivistic nor pluralistic, to name the three strands of contemporary theology of religion.⁹ Rather, this Christian theology of revelation should grow out of concrete interreligious experiences and patient and careful experiments of reading non-Christian sacred texts by a community of Christian believers and scholars, in study, meditation, private prayer, and even public worship. These texts will of course be selective and will have diverse significance for and impact on the Christian community, some more inspiring, others less.¹⁰ Remember that scripture is a human activity; a text is scripture only to the community that reads them as scripture. It is only from this communal reading of non-Christian scriptures that an adequate theology of revelation and inspiration will eventually emerge that is both appropriate to the Christian tradition of the Bible as the Word of God and responsive to the new experiences of non-Christian scriptures as a wellspring of wisdom and spirituality for Christians.

Ecclesial Identity and Multiple Religious Belonging?

One of the many objections against reading religious texts interreligiously is the fear that such a reading will weaken ecclesial identity and foster syncretistic forms of multiple religious belonging. If one reads and especially prays with non-Christian texts interreligiously, there is the possibility that one abandons Christianity and converts to one of the non-Christian religions or at least develops a hyphenated or hybrid religious identity. In any case, one's loyalty and fidelity to Christianity as the only true religion is jeopardized.

Such a fear seems to lurk behind *Dominus Iesus*. The Declaration emphatically asserts what it terms the 'unicity', 'unity', and 'universality' of the church. It declares that 'the Church of Christ, despite the divisions which exist among Christians, continues to exist fully only in the Catholic

9. For an excellent exposition of contemporary theologies of religion, see Knitter 2002. Knitter expands the three types of theology of religion into four models which he terms 'replacement', 'fulfillment', 'mutuality', and 'acceptance'.

10. Raimon Panikkar has produced a massive selection of Hindu sacred texts for non-Hindu believers (1977).

Church' (*DI*, 16), and that 'other "churches"—or more precisely, "ecclesial communities"—which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery are not Churches in the proper sense' (*DI*, 17). With regard to non-Christian religions, the Declaration affirms that 'if it is true that the followers of other religions can receive grace, it is also certain that *objectively speaking* they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation' (*DI*, 22).

Such an insistence on the Roman Catholic Church as the only locus of the true church of Christ and on the 'gravely deficient situation' of non-Christians is no doubt intended to draw firm and clear boundaries between (1) the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian denominations; and (2) Christianity and non-Christian religions. They also serve to bolster the ecclesial and social identity of Roman Catholics versus non-Roman Catholic Christians on the one hand and verses non-Christians on the other. Needless to say, reading non-Christian religious texts as scripture tends to fuzz those institutional boundaries.

There is no doubt that interreligious reading of religious texts may lead to a syncretistic mixing of incompatible religious ideas, scriptures, and spiritual practices. This has happened particularly in new religious movements where either new interpretations of the Bible are made, or altogether new scriptures based on the founders' new visions and divine encounters are composed and declared authoritative (e.g. Joseph Smith's *Book of Mormon*, Mary Baker Eddy's *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, L. Ron Hubbard's *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, Anton LaVey's *The Satanic Bible*, Mark and Elizabeth Prophet's *The Lost Teachings of Jesus*, Sun Myung Moon's *Divine Principle*, and innumerable books of the amorphous New Age movement). In all of these cases, the new books are intended to *replace* the Bible as sacred scripture.

The interreligious reading of sacred texts from various religions I am proposing does not aim at fusing two or more religions with their various constitutive elements, including their scriptures, into a new religion or a new religious movement with its own new scriptures. It claims no new religious visions, new prophecies, new miraculous events, new charisms, or new encounters with God as the source for new interpretations, new scriptures, and new religious institutions. Rather, its goal is to understand the Bible itself better through a comparative reading of other religious texts.

To achieve this richer understanding of the Bible, and consequently, to live a more authentically Christian life, a Christian may decide not only to read and learn from non-Christian scriptures but also do other things with non-Christians: to share life with them; to work with them for justice, peace and the integrity of creation; to undertake a theological dialogue with them; and above all, to share religious experiences with them, especially in prayer,

meditation, and worship. This fourfold sharing of life, work, theological dialogue, and religious experiences with non-Christians is not extraneous to the effort to understand non-Christian scriptures but form an intrinsic part of the hermeneutics of religious texts. In these activities, especially in the sharing of religious experiences, what is being practiced has been referred to as multiple religious belonging (Phan 2004: 60-83). To cite a celebrated confession of Raimon Panikkar, one of the most prolific and influential practitioners of interreligious hermeneutics and dialogue: 'I "left" as a Christian, "found myself" a Hindu, and I "return" as a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian' (1978: 2).

Recently there have been several prominent Christians who practiced this multiple belonging and through it have given us a fresh, rich and challenging understanding of the Bible and of the Christian faith and life as a whole. To be mentioned, among many, are Henri Le Saux, also known as Swami Abhishikananda, Hugo M. Enomiya-Lasalle, Charles Foucault, Thomas Merton, Bede Griffith, Raimon Panikkar, Aloysius Pieris, Lawrence Freeman, and the Episcopal priest, Ann Holmes Redding. Through their reading of Hindu, Buddhist, Zen, and Muslim texts, these persons have vastly enriched our understanding of the Bible.

As for their Christian, and more specifically, ecclesial identity, there has never been the slightest doubt in their minds that they are Christian through and through, even though church officials might question their orthodoxy and Christian identity. Indeed, their religious quest was deeply rooted in their Christian faith, and it is precisely their conviction that revelation and salvation, which is brought about by Jesus, are somehow present in other religious traditions that sets them on their journey of multiple religious belonging.

This does not mean, of course, that such multiple religious belonging does not cause severe theological difficulties and personal anguish. To take the case of Swami Abishikananda as an example, this Catholic-Hindu Benedictine monk experienced acutely the antinomy between the Christian and Hindu conceptions of reality and the painful push-and-pull of his double identity as a Hindu-Christian monk. The *advaita* or non-dualistic experience of the divine that he had as a Hindu seemed to run counter to his Christian faith in God as Triune, in God's creative act *ex nihilo*, and in prayer as an I-Thou relationship to God. Abishikananda lived this anguish for nearly twenty-five years, and was never fully able to reconcile the two apparently opposing theologies on the theoretical level. Rather, he counseled acceptance of this unresolvable tension without attempting to harmonize them.

Clearly, multiple religious belonging—and within it, reading religious texts interreligiously—is by no means a facile compromise or a painless feat of intellectual balancing between two opposing world views and two sets of scriptures. Rather, it is a lived drama of intellectual and religious

tension, never fully resolved on the theoretical level but affirmed at the existential plane. In one's quest for an ever-deeper understanding of reality and an ever-growing harmonious living with the divine, the self, and the cosmos, one's goal is—should be?—ever elusive, provisional, and unfinished until one reaches 'the other shore'.

Using Non-Christian Scriptures in Prayer and Spirituality?

Another site where interreligious reading of non-Christian texts presents the greatest threat of syncretism is prayer, spirituality, and worship, which usually are the most common areas where Christians read non-Christian scriptures. As is well known, scripture is primarily oral-aural; it is meant to be recited and proclaimed aloud, especially in public worship. It is only after the reading of scripture is concluded with the announcement 'This is the Word of the Lord' and the congregation answers 'Thanks be to God'—thereby acknowledging that God has spoken to them in that particular text—that the text becomes scripture. It is precisely here that syncretism is perceived as a 'clear and present danger'.

This danger was most vividly perceived by some senior Vatican officials when Pope John Paul II announced on January 25, 1986 his plan to invite non-Christian leaders (in addition to non-Catholic Christians) to come to Assisi to pray for peace. The meeting was criticized as skirting dangerous syncretism. It was left to Bishop Jorge Mejía, then Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, to explain that the purpose of the Assisi meeting was not to have religious leaders 'pray together'—that would be syncretism—but 'to be together to pray'. Subsequently, the concise formula 'not to pray together, but to come together to pray' became the official mantra to justify interreligious prayer.¹¹ In fact, in the actual event, after John Paul's welcome of religious leaders at the Portiuncula, religious leaders went to separate places in Assisi to pray with their co-religionists for ninety minutes and afterward gathered in the piazza in front of the basilica. There, each religious representative offered a prayer for peace according to his or her own religious tradition.

In his address to the religious representatives in Assisi, John Paul clarified the purpose of the meeting:

The fact that we have come here does not imply any intention of seeking a religious consensus among ourselves or negotiating our faith convictions. Neither does it mean that religions can be reconciled at the level of

11. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, distinguishes between 'multireligious prayer' and 'interreligious prayer', the former being prayers said by adherents of different religions separately in the same place, the latter being prayers said by them in common. For him, only the former is theologically acceptable.

a common commitment in an earthly project which would surpass them all. Nor is it a concession to relativism in religious beliefs, because every human being must sincerely follow his or her upright conscience with the intention of seeking and obeying the truth.

Our meeting attests only—and this is its real significance for the people of our time—that in the great battle for peace, humanity, in its very diversity, must draw from its deepest and most vivifying sources where its conscience is formed and upon which is founded the moral action of all people (Gioia 2006: no. 535).

Clearly, then, interreligious reading of non-Christian scriptures meets its real test—its rubber meeting the road, as it were—when it is read in the context of prayer and public worship. The question is not only whether believers of different religions can use their scriptures to pray together even if they believe in a different God but also—and here it is a much more difficult question—whether Christians can pray together with members of religions which do not mention God or do not profess faith in a personal God (see also Dupuis 2002: 236-52).

With regard to the first question, the answer is clear in the case of Judaism. Christians have since the very beginning read and prayed with the Hebrew scripture, especially the Psalms, in their liturgy and in their private devotion, even though Jews may object to the Christians' Christological interpretation of their *Tanakh*.

In the case of Islam, as Pope John Paul II has repeatedly asserted, Christians and Muslims worship the same God. In all his addresses to Muslims, John Paul II always highlights the fact that Christians and Muslims believe in the one God who is creator and expresses his admiration for the high ethical and religious demands Islam makes upon its followers, especially in terms of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Nevertheless, even John Paul, despite his great respect and admiration for Islam, did not pray together with Muslims, as he did with Jews in their synagogues.¹² Pope Benedict XVI, during his visit to the Blue Mosque in Istanbul in November 2006, elected to pray in silence rather than uttering any prayer.

The reason for the different attitude that some Christians have toward Islam lies in the fact that Islam claims to have corrected Christianity and to be a post-Christian (at times perceived as anti-Christian) religion, making it impossible for Christians to read and pray the Qur'an Christologically. But even so, I suggest that common praying between Christians and Muslims on the basis of the Qur'an is not impossible. In this respect I refer to an

12. To be mentioned is John Paul's visit to the Roman Synagogue on April 13, 1986, the first pope ever to do so. He conceives the visit not just as a social or political gesture but also as an explicitly religious act, the purpose of which is to pray together with Jews.

extraordinary document entitled *Christians and Muslims: Praying Together? Reflections and Texts*. It is issued by the 'Islam in Europe Committee' of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences and of the Conference of European Churches.¹³ The document acknowledges that Christians and Muslims 'praying together is a reality, often spontaneously, performed by individual members of different churches as well as by informal gatherings of Christians and Muslims together'. It points out that on political, civic, social, and personal occasions—such as the taking of office by a Muslim politician, the beginning and ending of the school year, marriage between a Christian and a Muslim, etc.—Muslims and Christians already have prayed together. It notes, with remarkable frankness and humility, that 'it is not churches that have taken the initiatives, but Christians, singly or in groups'. It also, like Benedict does, makes a distinction between 'multireligious prayer' (a gathering at which different religions pray in their own distinctive ways in a serial manner, as at the Assisi meeting), and 'interreligious prayer' (different religions subsume their distinctive idioms in common expressions mingling their perceptions of God). Finally, it offers a sample of interreligious prayers for Christian and Muslims composed by both Christians and Muslims and a selection of Psalms (e.g. Pss. 23, 90, and 104.24-35) and texts from the Qur'an (e.g. the *Fatiha*, suras 2.255, 49.13, and the litany of the 99 names of God).

With regard to Christians praying with believers not of the Abrahamic family, in particular Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism, the situation is much more complex, especially with non-theistic traditions. The theological question must be raised of whether Brahman of Hinduism, or Nirvana of Buddhism, or Heaven of Confucianism, or the Dao of Daoism can be identified with the God of Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac who has revealed the divine self as the 'Father' of Jesus of Nazareth. There is no doubt that the conceptual categories and frameworks of these Asian religious traditions are markedly different from those of Christianity, and that these fundamental differences must be acknowledged in interreligious prayer. Nevertheless, it is not impossible that Christians may make use of, let's say, the well-known passage of the *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanisad* (I, 3, 28), which Pope Paul VI cites in his address to the representatives of the various religions during his 1964 visit to Mumbai:

From the unreal lead me to the real!
 From darkness lead me to the light!
 From death lead me to immortality! (Cited in Dupuis 2002: 250).

Another text, from *Kena Upanisad* (I, 3-8), can also be used to address and praise God in God's ineffable transcendence (*neti neti*). Above all, the long and passionate prayer of praise and adoration that Arjuna sings to Krishna

13. The text is available at: www.cec-kek.org.

in *Bhagavad Gita* can certainly be recited with devotion by any Christian (see Zaehner 1966: 298).

Jacques Dupuis summarizes well the value of interreligious prayer based on the scriptures of non-Christian religions: 'The practice of common prayer is based on a communion in the Spirit of God shared in anticipation between Christians and "others", which in turns grows and is deepened through such practice. Through common prayer, Christians and the "others" grow together in the Spirit. Common prayer seems then to be the soul of interreligious dialogue, the deepest expression of dialogue and at the same time the guarantee of a deeper common conversion of the partners to God and to the others' (Dupuis 2002: 252).

How to Read Non-Christian Scriptures Interreligiously?

The last issue for our consideration is the hermeneutical question: How to read non-Christian religious texts interreligiously? The answer to this question cannot but be multiple and nuanced, depending on the types of reader, the goals sought, and the venues in which non-Christian scriptures are read. From what has been said so far, it is clear that non-Christian texts are read by various kinds of people (scholars of religion, theologians, church officials, people in the pews, and non-academics), for different purposes (intellectual enrichment, apologetical and missionary purposes, and spiritual nourishment), and in diverse venues (the academy, liturgical settings, social festivities, meditation and contemplation centers, and private devotion).

Needless to say, the method of reading non-Christian texts varies widely, depending on the kinds of reader, purpose, venue, and a lot of other things. One hermeneutical method may be appropriate to one type of reader, purpose, venue, and circumstance but may not be so for another. This should come as no surprise since the Bible itself is read differently by Christians, with a multiplicity of methods, none of which should be allowed to assume a monopoly.

At times, the metaphor of 'window' is used for the sacred texts and the goal of looking through—not at—this window of written texts is to understand oneself through the self-understanding of another. Of course, not everyone who reads non-Christian texts approaches them as 'window'. Other metaphors such as lens, perspective, light, mirror, voice, symphony, food, wellspring, treasure, world, or world view may be preferred. Without excluding the 'window' metaphor, these other metaphors, especially non-ocular ones, may suggest a different set of hermeneutical strategies.

Furthermore, some Christians reading non-Christian texts may not seek as their primary goal a theoretical understanding of their self, though this goal is certainly valid and worthwhile. Rather, their primary purpose may be a richer knowledge of and a deeper love for God or Jesus or church

or non-Christian neighbors, and the practice of a more inclusive spirituality, which they do not find in Christianity alone or at least in an adequate measure, may be helpful for this purpose.

The foregoing observations are not intended to invalidate the use of non-Christian scriptures as a window through which one understands oneself through the self-understanding of another. On the contrary, 'seeing one's self through the eyes of another' is arguably an indispensable epistemological act for understanding God and world. The understandings of God, self, and world are intimately intertwined and closely condition one another. The way we understand any one component of this triad necessarily impacts upon our understanding of the other two.

It may even be argued that the metaphor of 'window' for non-Christian scriptures has certain hermeneutical advantages over others. Windows are normally not things to be looked at in themselves, unless you happen to be a window-cleaner or a window-maker. Generally, one does not look *at* but *through* windows, just as one normally does not gaze on the finger pointing at the moon but rather on the moon itself. Windows act as openings into a hidden world which would not be accessible to us otherwise. Without them we would be in a bunker or in a box bereft of any means to know what is going on outside. Windows let in light by which we see and fresh air by which we breathe and live. Epistemologically, windows serve as heuristic devices by which we are enabled to understand reality, even though our understanding of that reality is framed and therefore limited. Consequently, as windows, non-Christian scriptures should not be studied as merely antique artifacts that are of interest only to historians and antiquarians. Nor should they be studied as linguistic or grammatical documents that are of concern only to philologists and litterateurs. Rather, as scripture, they must be approached as icons or sacraments of the Divine or the Real and as the Word of God made flesh in human words.

Furthermore, as a metaphor for texts, 'window' suggests a sense of objectivity, autonomy, and primacy over us as readers. Texts are not things readers create at their whim and pleasure. They exist before we discover them. They norm our reading. We submit ourselves to them; they make demands upon us, even though it is readers that make them scripture. We must approach sacred texts reverently, with pure hands and humble minds and devout hearts, the way Jews venerate the scroll, Muslims kiss the Qur'an, and Christians incense and carry the Bible in liturgical procession. We must be willing and ready to accept the intellectual, moral, and spiritual demands they may make upon us. We do not read them only to confirm what we already know or justify what we already do. There is always the possibility and risk that these non-Christian scriptures will provoke in us Christians an intellectual, affective, moral, and religious conversion, to use Bernard Lonergan's categories.

Hermeneutical theorists such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and David Tracy speak of hermeneutics as ways of understanding the world *behind, of* and *in front of* the text. The world *behind* the text stands for the historical contexts in which the text was written, which is discovered through the historical-critical method of textual, form and redaction criticisms. The world *of* the text represents the literary world of the text functioning as the mirror in which we see ourselves, which is unfolded by means of the literary method of narrative, rhetorical, and reader-response criticisms. Lastly, the world *in front of* the text stands for the existential possibilities presented by the text as lure and invitation, beckoning and challenging us to appropriate them as new, transforming, and liberating ways of being in the world. Though the metaphor of 'window' hints more readily to the world *behind* the text and emphasizes the iconic function of the sacred text, the other metaphors of text as mirror and as lure must not be excluded from our understanding of sacred texts so we will not miss the worlds *of* and *in front of* them.

Seeing oneself through the eyes of another is perhaps the most difficult and by the same token the most transformative aspect of reading religious texts interreligiously. It is difficult because it involves seeing oneself, and more narrowly, understanding the Bible, not simply through what we Christians can see and understand in non-Christian scriptures and learn from them. This, of course, is by no means an easy task; in itself it already requires intellectual humility and a willingness to acknowledge and reverence the presence of the divine Spirit and the existence of divine revelation outside of Christianity. It is a deeply disturbing and threatening act of de-centering oneself and one's religious institution. It demands that we Christians jettison our pervasive sense of moral and religious superiority and make ourselves vulnerable to transformation and even conversion to another religious tradition or at least to forms of multiple religious belonging.

However praiseworthy and fruitful this act of reading non-Christian scriptures in order to learn from them is, it is still seeing the other through one's own eye. In so doing the danger abounds that we only see what we are conditioned to seeing by our own scripture and religious traditions or want to see only what interests us. We are still looking through our own 'windows' and see only similarities or equivalences between Christianity and other religions. The religious 'Other' serves only as a reflection of ourselves, as the mirror in which we see ourselves, albeit somewhat differently, but the alterity of the Other does not yet function as the lens through which we re-view ourselves.

In religious matters, this alterity or the eye of the Other is revealed by two distinct questions: How do the religious Others see themselves, which often is very different from how Christians see them? And how do they see us, which often is very different from how we see ourselves and may

be quite hostile to us? Taking into account this alterity of the Other and these two questions as hermeneutical lenses seriously complicates the interreligious reading of religious texts vastly. For instance, some Christians reading the Qur'an may want to expand thereby their specifically Christian understanding of God, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mary, or to enrich their practices of profession of faith, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and pilgrimage. This is no doubt a laudable goal, but the glass of their 'window' is basically a Christian-tinted one, and as a result the risk of missing what the Qur'an says about itself as God's revealed Word and what it says about the Bible and Christians is very high. Because they read the Qur'an through the Bible, these Christians may not be open to taking seriously those statements of the Qur'an that contradict the Christian faith and practice. Only by seeing oneself through the eyes of another—both through what the others say about themselves and what they say about us—is reading religious scriptures interreligiously truly interreligious. Such an approach to the religious Other as other is all the more important when we expand interreligious reading to include interreligious dialogue where the historical relations between Christians and Muslims and between Islam and the West are fraught with mutual hatred, violence, and war.

As to reading strategies that will be helpful in interreligious reading of non-Christian texts, Francis X. Clooney, a Christian theologian and Hinduologist and a professor at Harvard Divinity School, has offered valuable suggestions, and I will mention them in concluding this essay. Clooney, along with a handful of other Catholic theologians, has been engaged in elaborating what is called 'comparative theology'. This new theological enterprise is highly relevant for the practice of interreligious reading of sacred texts since the latter may be regarded as an integral part of the former.

By *comparative* theology, Clooney means not simply another specialization within theology such as the theology of religions or the theology of Christian mission but a project that 'intends a rethinking of every theological issue and rereading of every theological text' *after* a careful and detailed comparison of the Christian theological texts with those of other religious traditions (1993: 6). As a *theological* discipline, comparative theology, while akin to the comparative study of religion, differs from it in 'its resistance to generalizations about religion, its commitment to the demands of one or another tradition, and its goal of a reflective retrieval, after comparison, of the comparativist's (acknowledged) community's beliefs in order to restate them more effectively' (Clooney 1993: 6-7).

As Clooney practices comparative theology, his main if not exclusive emphasis is on reading texts, and in his case, Hindu texts. Of course, the purpose of comparative reading is to discover both differences and similarities between two or more texts. To accomplish this task, Clooney suggests five reading strategies or models. The first two are derived from Advaita

hermeneutics; the third from Hans-Georg Gadamer and David Tracy; the fourth from Philip Wheelwright; and the fifth from Jacques Derrida.

The first two Advaitic hermeneutical practices are called ‘coordination’ (*upasamhāra*) and ‘superimposition’ (*adhyāsa*). By ‘coordination’ two texts are used together due to their common terms, themes, and parallel structures and conclusions, in order to mutually illumine each other. By ‘superimposition’ or juxtaposition, our own religious text is placed on top of or side by side another, thereby defamiliarizing our religious text by the vicinity of another religious text so that an enhanced understanding of our own text may result. In the ‘conversation’ model, one reads back-and-forth between the two texts as if in dialogue with them, listens to each text attentively and carefully, takes their questions and answers seriously, and remains open to possibilities of challenges and corrections and of new understandings. By ‘metaphor’—or more precisely, by the ‘semantic motion’ implicit in the metaphor—the texts are imaginatively and creatively stretched out beyond their original meanings and are combined into new meanings and applications. By ‘collage’, parts of the texts are excised, decomposed, and recombined so that the collaged texts are made to meet, resist, and intrude upon each other, destabilize each other’s meanings, and unsettle the reader into constructing new meanings.

In sum, by coordination, superimposition, conversation, metaphor, and collage, Clooney means:

- (i) strategies by which one makes the reading together of compared texts a manageable but not reductive reflection; (ii) the temporal arrangements by which one text is allowed to enhance the other; (iii) the arrangement in multiple texts as the initiation of an ongoing and necessarily unpredictable conversation; (iv) the construction of tensions by which the texts taken together are allowed to communicate more than either of them alone; (v) the visualization of proximities by which the texts marginalize and destabilize one another (1993: 174-75).

Finally, from the new understandings of one’s own Christian texts obtained as the result of and *after* reading non-Christian texts, one will attempt to rearticulate one’s understanding of the Christian beliefs. This is comparative theology proper. Here, of course, the question of truth unavoidably emerges. After crossing over to non-Christian scriptures one returns to one’s Christian faith to rethink and reformulate its whole panoply of diverse and variegated forms of creed, cult, code, and community. One may ask whether these creedal, liturgical, moral, and ecclesial forms and formulations of the Christian faith are still valid or at least valid to the extent we thought they were before our encounter with non-Christian texts.

Of course, one need not reject *a priori* our current forms and formulations as false as a result of our reading religious texts interreligiously. Very often, the issue is not a stark either/or choice between the Christian creed, cult,

code, or community and those of another religious tradition whose sacred scriptures one has read and absorbed. It is not a matter of choosing light against darkness, truth against error, goodness against evil, beauty against ugliness. Rather, it is more a matter of including and integrating the new insights one has gathered from an interreligious reading of non-Christian scriptures into a new formulation of the Christian faith and practice.

Very often questions are asked, especially by the guardians of orthodoxy, whether the comparativist theologian's reformulations of the Christian faith and practice are correct and true, and punitive measures are taken against theologians whose views are judged ambiguous, misleading, and confusing. Of course, theologians must exercise their task of *fides quaerens intellectum* responsibly and humbly, avoiding sensationalism and celebrity. On the other hand, church officials and the community itself must understand and accept the fact that a reformulation of the Christian faith *after* and *in light of* an encounter with non-Christian texts and practices is an extremely difficult task that should not be foreclosed by a premature condemnation or mindless repetition of ancient formulas. We owe Sugirtharajah an enormous debt for teaching us how to approach the sacred texts of other religions responsibly and humbly, in freedom and gratitude, in order to learn from them who we are, what we believe, and what we must do.

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LAND OF THE KAURI AND THE LONG WHITE CLOUD: BEGINNING TO READ MATTHEW 1–2 ECOLOGICALLY

Elaine M. Wainwright

‘AO TE A ROA,
Land of the Long White Cloud’,¹ proclaims W.J. Kennedy (1976: 15).

‘If I were a giant
sheltering kauri’, muses Hirini Melbourne (1999: 68).

‘I came to grips with the kauri and turned him, in all his splendour, into a
symbol’, says Colin McCahon.²

In the land of the Kauri and the Long White Cloud, the poet and the artist, Maori and Pakeha,³ have been captured by these two symbols. They fuse the human and the more-than-human as evoked in the poem *Tough Old Man* by Ramon Te Wake:

You were a formidable might
Like a kauri tree... (Te Wake).

As images, they have captured my imagination as a newcomer to New Zealand,⁴ and the kauri tree in particular has provided me with a symbol as it did Colin McCahon, one of the great artists of New Zealand whom I quoted above.⁵ Symbol and metaphor, especially those drawn from the cosmos or the wider Earth community beyond the human are significant in directing the attention of readers of biblical texts beyond the human-

1. Aotearoa, land of the long white cloud, has become a way of naming New Zealand.

2. While evoking the sentiments of McCahon’s statement, I would not want to continue the gendering of the kauri that one finds there.

3. Maori are the traditional inhabitants of the islands of Aotearoa New Zealand, coming to the islands from elsewhere in the Pacific some time in the thirteenth century CE. See King 2003: 48-60. Pakeha is the name given by the Maori to the ‘newcomers’ to or later colonizers of this land, originally those of European descent.

4. I am an Australian by birth and came to New Zealand only in 2003.

5. Since the visual symbol of the giant kauri is not available to us in an essay such as this, I may need to explain that this tree reaches its branches up to the sky to catch the sun and, in maturity, towers above the rest of the forest. It is tall and straight and, as it ages to one or even toward two thousand years old, its girth becomes huge.

human and human-divine interactions that characterize these texts. The current ecological crisis in our world almost demands that we learn to read biblical texts ecologically in order that engagement in living ecologically and sustainably may shape our reading of biblical texts and such ecological readings might, in their turn, shape our ethical engagement with sustainable living.

This paper is, therefore, an experiment, an urgent experiment. Firstly, I will discuss, in dialogue with a small selection of theorists, the approach that I will take in this paper which I am calling an ecological reading but which entails the intersection of a number of reading perspectives. This approach will then be used to guide an ecological reading of the opening chapters of Matthew's Gospel.

Developing a Reading Lens

Gradually, over recent years, my feminist hermeneutic has been developing into a multidimensional one that has sought to hold together feminist, post-colonial and ecological perspectives (Wainwright 2006: 7-32). Together with many other theorists and practitioners, I have recognized the 'interconnective web of gendered, racial, colonial and environmental dominations' that ecofeminists and postcolonial critics have identified in recent decades (2006: 23). This recognition brings with it an awareness that movements toward life-enhancement rather than life-destruction need also to be multidimensional, holding within a creative web the complex aspects of life shared in the cosmos (Merchant 2003: 242).⁶ The biblical narrative, on the other hand, together with its long history of reception or re-creation has tended and tends to shape a symbolic universe and imagination that is anthropocentric rather than cosmic and multidimensional, at least for contemporary readers, focused as they are, on the human community and its relationship with divinity as noted above. Joel Primack and Nancy Abrams, authors of *The View from the Center of the Universe: Discovering our Extraordinary Place in the Cosmos*, have suggested, however, that it is '[p]oets, artists, prophets, and other thinkers [who] through history have shaped cosmologies with words and images' (2006: 57). As the human community seeks a new story,⁷ a new way of viewing the Universe that can hold together

6. Merchant speaks of a 'partnership ethic' in the 'remything of the Edenic Recovery Narrative or the writing of a new narrative altogether', a project which she explores in her text. In her entire final chapter (2003: 223-42), she explores this image of 'partnership'.

7. Berry says that '[o]ur genetic coding, through the ecological movement and through the bioregional vision, is providing us with a new archetypal world. The universe is revealing itself to us in a special manner just now' (1988: 215). It is in listening to the Earth that we will learn a new story, a new way of viewing the Universe.

the story offered to us by scientists and cosmologists and a re-articulated religious/biblical story or stories, one way forward is to be in dialogue with 'poets, artists, prophets and other thinkers' of our time and earlier and of our different places around the globe. This aspect of the shaping of a new imaginary is one that I wish to develop in this paper.

Lorraine Code in her book, *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location* describes such a new imaginary in this way: 'ecological thinking is about imagining, crafting, articulating, endeavoring to enact principles of ideal cohabitation' (2006: 24). It is a process, a *reconfiguring of our social imaginary* through 'a cluster of subversive and productive practices, metaphors, images' (2006: 33; emphasis added).⁸ *Suspicion* and *retrieval* which are already key features of ecofeminist and other ecological approaches (Habel 2008: 3-8) will enable me to hold in creative tension within the emerging or reconfiguring ecological imaginary the feminist and postcolonial. Code also speaks of *rupture* and *transformation* initially of our thinking but also of our praxis—aspects which need further development which is not possible here. In this, I am aware that *suspicion* and *rupture* may shift and change the master imaginary with all its dualisms (Plumwood 1993)⁹ but may not render it redundant. Attention to the multiple subversive perspectives represented in what I name as feminist, postcolonial and ecological will, however, reconfigure ecological thinking. Reading biblical texts ecologically participates in this ecological reconfiguring. A multi-dimensional ecological perspective will lead to new ways of reading the text which in their turn will contribute to the shaping of a new imaginary which will be enacted in Earth-transforming praxis for the entire Earth community.

Chela Sandoval in her *Methodology of the Oppressed* likewise seeks a 'differential consciousness as a practice of social intervention', identifying such methodology as 'a set of processes, procedures, and technologies for decolonizing the imagination' (2000: 68).¹⁰ Within the decolonization

8. Code, commenting on the social imaginary, writes, 'It is about often-implicit but nonetheless effective systems of images, meaning, metaphors, and interlocking explanations—expectations within which people, in specific times periods and geographical-cultural climates, enact their knowledge and subjectivities and craft their self-understandings' (2006: 29).

9. Plumwood's entire study is founded on the belief that a new ecological consciousness must engage with and seek to transform the patriarchal system of hierarchical dualisms. Code draws on Plumwood's work.

10. She goes on to demonstrate the ways in which such processes, procedures, technologies and terminologies have emerged within the different realms of oppositional consciousness and resistance movements and yet these have remained fragmentary rather than being the ground for new interdisciplinary study and a strengthening of social engagement and intervention. She names this isolating of one from the other an 'apartheid'. While Sandoval does not explicitly address ecological issues, she does

and reconfiguring of what Code would call a new ecological imaginary or imagination, Sandoval recognizes the centrality of *power* and a shift in the metaphors with which we imagine it. She traces this shift from modern vertical or pyramidal notions of power to the postmodern horizontal imagery in which 'race, class, gender, age, or sexual orientation' contend on a 'globalized, flattened but mobile, gridlike terrain' (2000: 72-73). Such shifts in the human community are performed within our habitat Earth that opens up for consideration aspects of analysis of power yet to be undertaken. Power must be considered in the fullness of its multidimensionality—indeed Sandoval names one of her section headings 'multidimensional powers' (2000: 75). It is constantly being negotiated and performed. An ecological hermeneutic will be attentive to such performativity of power in order to critique it and to claim it in a new differential consciousness which Sandoval calls 'prophetic love' (2000: 146). She does not speak of this in theological but rather social terms. In this, however, she is and can be a significant dialogue partner for those undertaking ecofeminist readings in the theological arena.

Power as an analytic category is also key for Musa Dube who notes that one of the challenges of feminist New Testament scholarship is 'recognizing our overlapping histories of imperialism and colonialism' and interrogating 'how international domination and oppression is propounded and maintained, how it affects women' (2005: 191) and, I would add, all members of the biotic community. This work takes particular account of power in the context of empire, a very important focus when interpreting Gospel texts in which the image of the *basileia* or empire that was intended to function subversively has been used historically to legitimize imperial and colonial subjugations.¹¹ Employing Sandoval's notion of the performative functioning of power will be important in a new multidimensional ecological reading.

It is, indeed, postcolonial studies that have drawn the attention of biblical scholars to the colonizing tendencies within the biblical text as well as contemporary contexts. So often, both in the recent history of humanity as well as in the biblical narrative, the colonization of peoples was accompanied by a colonization of land, of material resources, so that the human and the more-than-human came under the domination of the empire, whichever empire was in question (Carter 2007: 69-75).¹² Our friend and colleague,

explore the multidimensionality of oppressions and hence the need for multidimensionality in response.

11. Code notes that one of her interests in developing what she calls *ecological thinking* 'is to show how the discourse of autonomy and individualism, integral to epistemologies of mastery, comes into tension—*productive* tension—with the rhetorical and practical challenges ecological thinking poses to the self-certainties of western capitalism' (2006: 38).

12. Carter provides a very nuanced exploration of how the term 'postcolonial' might be understood in relation to a reading of Matthew's Gospel so that it is not employed

R.S. Sugirtharajah, in whose honour this book of essays has been compiled, has, over many years, drawn the attention of biblical scholars to three key aspects of colonization within their discipline: colonization within the biblical text; colonization within biblical scholarship; and colonization within their contemporary contexts. That such postcolonial readings combine readily with other liberative perspectives has been acknowledged by Sugirtharajah, especially the nuanced ways in which the postcolonial and feminist have been integrated (Sugirtharajah 2002: 28-30). As far as I could determine, he has not yet addressed explicitly the postcolonial-ecological nexus. He does, however, in his most recent publication, *Troublesome Texts*, explore the problematic aspects of various biblical interpretations that emerged in response to the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami from a postcolonial perspective (2008: 67-81).¹³ In this article, he suggests that one way in which we can liberate the biblical text as ancient text in the face of ecological disasters is to turn to 'creative literature' which, he says 'has an engaging way of re-telling ancient sacred stories and myths' (2008: 77).

This article will use poetry as one form of 'creative literature'. This will be undertaken in dialogue with an engagement with the text of Matthew 1-2 toward an ecological reading. It will be undertaken from a multidimensional perspective in the hope that the new readings which emerge will make one small contribution to the re-telling of the ancient biblical story, not just in the face of ecological disasters but of the more global ecological oppression that characterizes this point in human history.

In addition to (1) suspicion and retrieval, rupture and transformation as practices within the reconfiguring of an ecological imaginary; and (2) recognition of the multidimensionality of power and its performativity, I want to add just one more guiding principle to my ecological reading lens; namely, Code's notion of '*habitat*' or *context* (Code 2006: 37).¹⁴ Within her emerging imaginary, habitat is a place to know in a two-edged sense of knowing: (1) coming to a new ecological knowing; and (2) knowing one's own place or habitat from which one interprets in all its multiplicity. As my title indicates, this is a significant aspect of the particular reading I am proposing in

anachronistically. His third aspect of a postcolonial reading is similar to that of Code as noted in the previous footnote; namely, that contemporary readers must critically evaluate the Gospel text 'so as not to perpetuate imperial practices, mindset and language' (Carter 2007: 71).

13. His chapter title is: 'Tsunami, Trauma and Text: Hermeneutics after the Asian Deluge'.

14. For Code, *habitat* is 'a place to know [that] is central to ecological thinking, as I conceive it, although in its more metaphorical applications, social-political, cultural, and psychological elements figure alongside physical and (other) environmental contributors to the 'nature' of a habitat and its inhabitants, at any historical moment' (2006: 37).

this paper. For the biblical reader, to this second aspect one would also want to add knowing the context or habitat in the biblical text/s being interpreted and from which they have been constructed and interpreted. This is more multidimensional than *habitat* or context being considered only in relation to the context from which one interprets.¹⁵ With habitat added to my multidimensional reading lens, I turn now to re-reading Matthew 1–2.

Genealogy and Birth

The Gospel of Matthew begins with the phrase *biblos geneseōs*, ‘the book of the genealogy’ (RSV), ‘the account of the genealogy’ (NRSV), or ‘a record of the genealogy’ (NIV). I have demonstrated elsewhere that this opening phrase functions intertextually with Gen. 2.4 and 5.1–2 (Wainwright 1998: 53): the *geneseōs* of the heavens and the earth (Gen. 2.4); and the *geneseōs* of the human community—of the *anthrōpōn*, male and female (Gen. 5.1–2). Rhetorically, Mt. 1.1 and its rich intertextuality prepares readers for the possibility of a new narrative, a new story of the heavens and the earth, the human community and divinity named as creative/creating power held together within the woven tapestry of text, the *biblos*.

Biblos, however, also yields other potential meaning-making. Prior to its designation as book or narrative, it named the bark, the inner bark of the papyrus plant from which the sheets of papyrus were made to be used as the carrier of writing, of narrative, of story (the original Gospel texts would have been written on papyrus when first committed to writing). Earth and the products of Earth provide the material that carries the story of the heavens and the earth, the human community and the divine creative power. They participate in the web of relationships that, when brought to awareness, contribute to the creating of a new story, a new imagination, a new symbolic universe in which the human and the more-than-human participate together (see also Elvey 2004: 64–79).

The extraordinary ecological potential of the opening phrase of Matthew’s Gospel seems to be silenced or at least limited as the narrative proceeds. The *biblos geneseōs* is that of *Jesus Christos, son of David, son of*

15. Code notes her debt to Donna Haraway in this and she goes on to indicate the multi-dimensionality of habitat or context: ‘[t]he mappings integral to this analysis chart the structural intricacies of place; the materialities, ethologies, genealogies, commitments, and power relations that shape the knowledge and subjectivities enacted there; the intractable locational specificities that resist homogenization or suggest novel connections; the positionings available or closed to would-be knowers; the amenability or resistance of both human and nonhuman entities to being known. Situation, then, is not just a place *from which to know*, as the language of perspectives implies, indifferently available for occupancy by anyone who chooses to stand there’ (2006: 100).

Abraham, and the genealogy unfolds with the thirty-nine-fold repetition of the phrase ‘male *egennēsen* male’ (Abraham became the father of Isaac; Isaac became the father of Jacob; and so on). It is a human-centred genealogy, negating or at least obscuring the potential of the *biblos geneseōs* of the heavens and the earth (Gen. 2.4). But it is also patriarchal, similarly negating or obscuring the potential of the *biblos geneseōs* of the Adam created male and female (Gen. 5.1-2). Its rhetorical effect is, therefore limited by the androcentric and patriarchal/kyriarchal world views of its habitat of compilation.¹⁶ At the same time, however, in recognition of the multidimensionality of the narrative mapping of power, a first-century Matthean reader might note that this particular *biblos geneseōs* constitutes a decentralizing of the power of Rome and its empire (Carter 2007: 79; 2001: 77-79).¹⁷

The evocation of the *biblos geneseōs* of Gen. 2.4 challenges not only the limitation of the patriarchal genealogy but also Mt. 1.17 and its three sets of fourteen human generations. Genealogy, Primack and Abrams suggest, cannot be limited to the human community or to a particular sector of that community. Genealogy, from a cosmic viewpoint, includes ‘our distant ancestors [who] are what everyone on Earth shares... [the] billions upon billions of creatures [that] have struggled so that their children would survive, and those children have led to us’ (Primack and Abrams 2006: 291-92). What is important is ‘to develop imagery that will bridge the incomprehensible gap between us and our 14-billion-year-old source’ (Primack and Abrams 2006: 293). Apirana Taylor captures something of this in his poem *Whakapapa* (‘Genealogy’):¹⁸

whakapapa whakapapa ties you to the land...
this is your inheritance
the sky and earth and all that lies between (1996: 10-11).

This is the genealogy of Jesus Christos. These are the generations, these are the *whakapapa* of Jesus Christos. These generations can be evoked in New Zealand, the land of the kauri and the long white cloud, as *whakapapa*.

16. Carter notes other perspectives from which the rhetorical effect of the genealogy is limited when he says that ‘[w]hile the genealogy’s identity-forming function is good news for Jesus’ followers, it has unfortunate implications which must be lamented. The genealogy co-opts and reframes Jewish traditions and history to serve its Christological perspective. But in claiming Jesus and his followers as central to God’s purposes, it disenfranchises all those who do not follow Jesus’ (2007: 77-79). He goes on to say, however, that ‘[i]ronically, the very same co-opted traditions indicate that God’s faithfulness to covenant commitments is much more steadfast and inclusive than the genealogy’s exclusionary claims’.

17. In the second citation, Carter discusses, in more detail than is possible here, four observations on the polemical nature of the Matthean genealogy and its resistance to Roman imperial power and claims to power.

18. *Whakapapa* is the Maori term for genealogy and it is central to Maori identity.

They can and must be evoked in many different places around our globe and evoked beyond planet Earth, evoked in the great cosmic universe whose time and whose being is beyond our imagining, caught up in the ‘initial flaring forth of the fireball’, some fourteen or fifteen billion years ago (McDonagh, 2004: 82). It is this that the *biblos geneseōs* of Mt. 1.1 evokes. It is this too that we find represented in Kendrick Smithyman’s *Lone Kauri* in which he remembers some great cosmic event beyond human knowledge which has left its imprint on this land as giant kauris became buried:

as though sometime was
a great wind which put down a bush if not a forest (1997: 197).

They too are our ancestors, members of our genealogy as biotic community. The ancestors of the kauri, ancestors of all that constitutes the universe are our ancestors, are the ancestors, the generations of *Jesus Christos*.

The scene shifts at Mt. 1.18 to a more specific *genesis* or birth, that of *Iēsou Christou*. Our reading of the genealogy has prepared us to have our imagination evoked beyond the limits of the human genealogy. The narrative of the human birth of Jesus, son of Mary, adopted son of Joseph continues this evocation and the expanding of our ecological imaginary is assisted by these words from Robert Sullivan’s ‘Our Country’:

...our greatest love
our country. New Zealand is still our child (2005: 65).

The birth of a child, the birth of a country, the birth of a star, the birth of a universe—all these are interconnected and the very particularity of the *genesis* of *Iēsou Christou* can be read in a way that evokes such connections. Within three verses, the Matthean narrator repeats the phrase *ek pneumatos hagiou* (‘from, out of or by a spirit that is holy’, 1.18, 20) to describe the *genesis* of Jesus. Denis Edwards in his book *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit*, envisions the spirit that is holy as ‘breathing life into the universe in all its stages: into its laws and initial conditions, its origin and its evolution’ (2004: 43). It is this spirit which links the birth of the human Jesus to all other births, in the ongoing becoming of what is new.¹⁹ Habitat and the holy are intertwined.

The gestating child also has a habitat—*en gastri*, in the womb, in the body of the woman Mary, his mother (1.18). Anne Elvey explores in great detail the significance of the pregnant body for an ecological reading of the

19. Edwards explores the notion of the new in the emergent universe, and says that ‘[t]he Creator Spirit is not to be thought of as simply sustaining the universe, but must be thought of as enabling and empowering the genuinely new to occur. The Spirit can be understood as the immanent divine power that enables evolutionary emergence, continually giving to creation itself the capacity to transcend itself and become more than it is’ (2004: 48).

biblical narrative (2005: 31-110). She notes that ‘in pregnancy the male is not autonomous’ (2005: 45) and, through a careful study of representations of the pregnant body in the ancient Near East through to Second Temple Judaism, she is able to draw out some of the complexities that emerge around the symbol of the pregnant body as it may have been evoked in the Matthean text:

Firstly, the ways in which human relationships with nature change through human interventions (for example sowing, baking, ploughing, writing, philosophy or theology) have resonance in cultural representations of the pregnant body.

Secondly, the ways in which women experience fertility, and in which women’s fertility connects with social life (through structures of kinship and relationship to land) influence the ways in which the pregnant body is depicted.

Thirdly, the ways in which relationships between divine and human realms are understood impact on representation of the pregnant body (2005: 56).

As Elvey has indicated, the birth of the child from the pregnant woman also represents the birth of the mother (2005: 111-17). In the Matthean narrative, *mētēr*/mother does not occur until 1.18 in relation to the *genesis* of Jesus when both the mother and the child are born in and through the interconnectedness within the pregnant body. This pregnancy and birth is bound up with kinship as Joseph struggles with the pregnancy of his betrothed from a source other than his seed. It is the divine voice, the voice of the angel which assures him that this pregnancy, this birth is of God and the narrator confirms this with the fulfillment text: in this child, in this pregnancy, in this birth, God is with God’s people in a new way (1.22-23). The pregnant body, the materiality of this body, its potential to birth the new and hence its intimate relationship with life (and with death) is the site of divine/human encounter in the context of biotic community.

And in the Matthean narrative this birth has a purpose: Jesus is to *save* his people (1.21). This claim is informed by way of its intertextuality with Israel’s sacred story as I have already demonstrated (Wainwright 1998: 59; see also Carter 2001: 75-90). Just as God saved the enslaved Hebrews from the imperial power of Egypt through Moses whose birth narrative is told in the opening chapters of the Book of Exodus, so too God is now going to demonstrate God’s power to save through Jesus whose birth narrative is unfolding in this opening chapter of the Matthean Gospel. Implicit in this narrative is the imperial power of Rome. There is also another birth evoked intertextually in Mt. 1.21 and cited explicitly in 1.23; namely, that of the child who will be called Emmanuel (Isa. 7-9). Imperial powers loom one behind the other in this intertext as Israel and Syria join forces against Judah with all, in turn, being under the threat of Assyrian invasion. A woman

pregnant with child constitutes the symbolic force that stands against these powers of empires. This is, indeed, a remapping of power. And it is in this remapping of power that God is with God's people.

In today's world, however, power is not operative only within the human community but always functions and is performed within the biotic community and the unfolding cosmos. In the face of the current ecological crisis, the cry of Primack and Abrams—can we 'save the earth' (2006: 37)—is one which calls for a much more expansive reading of the birth narrative of Jesus who will save.²⁰ While Carter notes that an interpretation that separates a religious or moral interpretation of Jesus' saving from its political implication is inadequate (2001: 106), I would argue that failing to extend considerations of power beyond the socio-political to include the ecological and the functioning of power within ecological communities is likewise inadequate. Within such a reading, the Matthean Gospel might suggest that God is with God's 'us' (1.23), not just as a particular geographical, historical, political and economic community but as all who participate in the biotic community within the context of a new ecological imaginary.

Rachel's Tears

The celebration of birth in the first chapter of the Matthean narrative gives way to the violence and conflict accompanying the birth of Jesus expressed symbolically in the poetic weeping of Rachel:

'A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more' (Mt. 2.18).

And with the lamentation of Rachel echoes the voice of Dinah Moengarangi Rawiri who mourns the violence of ecological devastation:

... I have found the death of a river
And the sorrow of a land.

The cries of lament, of Rachel and of Dinah Moengarangi Rawiri, remind us of the violence that has been committed not only within and against members of the human community but also against the entire Earth community. Walter Brueggemann reminds us of the need for the '*public processing of pain*' (1987: 16). It is this that one hears echoed in the voice of Rachel and of Rawiri.

20. I am conscious in engaging with this text of Primack and Abrams that it is important not to read the notion of saving from an anthropocentric perspective but rather interactively.

Habitat constitutes the context for the opening of Matthew 2. The *genesis* of Jesus takes place in Bethlehem of Judea (2.1; cf. 2.5, 6, 8, 16). The name of the village is itself evocative. It means ‘house of bread’ and so links place with human habitation or house and its constituent materiality. In this instance, it also links place with bread, the staple of human sustenance. It is, therefore, representative of the interchange and exchange that constitutes the biotic community. Just as the pregnant Mary gave of her body and its nutrients to the growing fetus, so too the grains of wheat are given up to the making of flour and bread that feeds the human community. There are in these connections traces of death and life that prepare the reading community for the giving over by Jesus of his life for the sake of life later in the narrative.²¹

But Bethlehem is also the place of the performance and contestation of power that characterize the unfolding Matthean narrative. The wise ones from the East come seeking the one born king (*basileōs*) of the Jews (Mt. 2.2), asking, in Jerusalem, the centre of Herodian power, what Carter calls a ‘politically tactless and disruptive question’ (2007: 80). Herod, the puppet king exercising power at the behest of Rome, is disturbed by their question and consults with the Jewish officials whose position is dependent on their compliance as leaders of the colonized Jewish community with Herod and more remotely with the emperor. Their response to his question about where the *Christos*, the anointed one who might be king, priest or prophet is to be born (Horsley and Hanson 1985) is drawn from their scriptures. As is often the case for colonized peoples, they must know their own language, in this instance the scriptures, as well as the language of the colonizer—the language of power. They interpret Mic. 5.2. It is neither the exact LXX or the MT (Davies and Allison 1988: 242). Bethlehem, the tiny village south west of the centre of power, Jerusalem, was small and insignificant as had been David, the last son of Jesse whose village it was. Mic. 5.2 names it ‘one of the little clans of Judah’ (NRSV) but it, like David with whom it was associated, became significant. One wonders whether in the words of the chief priests and scribes there is not the hope that once again, a reversal of power might be associated with Bethlehem.

It was, however, the cosmos and its signs that lead the wise ones to the child who was to be born for a mission of transformation, not the words of the scribes. But Rome too evoked the cosmos and its signs to point to good omens surrounding the birth of an emperor (Danker 1992; Carter 2000: 75). Attentiveness to the cosmos can be caught up in and by imperial power, as

21. Mt. 20.28 speaks of the giving of life as a ‘ransom’ for many. While an ecological reading would question the scapegoat aspect of this reference and its link to atonement theologies, it is possible to explore the potential meaning of this verse within the context of gift and exchange, an aspect that will need further attention elsewhere.

we know from our own time, and its race for control of space, just as it can lead to transformative praxis for the sake of the entire Earth community. As we note the ambivalence in the text, its subversions and its own narrating of the performance of power, we need to be attentive to the imaginary that our reading is shaping. Is it one that will be transformative of habitat and power in ways that will be life-enhancing for all in the biotic community, or is it supporting power and perspectives that can be death-dealing? Ecological readers must be attentive to this power of the text and its interaction with each one's own consciousness or imaginary. An ecological reading must take account of the effect of meaning-making.

As the first section of Matthew 2 draws to a close, the reader is drawn into the habitat in the text; namely, 'the house', the material space in which there is exchange of gifts between the wise ones and the mother and child. Traces of the materiality of the pregnant body of the child's mother still linger in the text and draw attention to the materiality of other bodies—of the child and of the wise ones. There is also reversal in the performance of power imaged and described in this text as the wise ones fall down and pay homage to the child. Other materials of the Earth are also drawn into this reversal. To this endangered child of the endangered woman (Wainwright 1998: 58-60) are offered the gifts that the nations will bring to the God of Israel ('gold and frankincense', Isa. 60.6) and the homage paid to the child (*prosekynēsan*, Mt. 2.11) echoes that of the kings of the nations (*hoi basil-eis*) who fall down (*proskynēsousin*) before the king's son in Ps. 72.11. The gifts which play in this scene of extraordinary reversal that characterizes the Matthean narrative are material: frankincense and myrrh are gum resin of native trees known both for their perfume and their healing qualities, while gold is a naturally occurring metal found amid the rocks of the Earth. They invite reflection on gift and exchange, thematics that have already emerged from the ecological reading of this Matthean text (Primavesi 2003).

Divine reversal is not, however, a deterrent to destructive human power. As the narrative unfolds, it is divine power that saves Jesus from the rampage of a tricked Herod (Mt. 2.13-15) but the children of Bethlehem are not so fortunate. As I noted elsewhere (Wainwright 1998: 64-65), the voice of Rachel intervenes on behalf of the silenced: the erased children of Bethlehem; the erased mothers who like Mary would have been 'with' their children (see Mt. 2.11, 13, 14, 20, 21); and erased divine compassion (imaged female). Into an ecological reading of these verses can be drawn the erased voice of Earth, the erased pain and cry of Earth destroyed by the rampages of human power, erased by hierarchal and dualistic consciousness, and annihilated from memory.

Lament—the lament of Rachel, the lament of Dinah Moengarangi Rawiri together with that of Nancy Bruce, who in her poem, *Unfinished Canoe*, mourns the great kauri that has been fallen to make a *waka*, a great canoe,

but has been left abandoned—rises up in a public processing of pain. They all remind us of the potential in the human heart for destruction—of any and all forms of life and being on our planet. The saving of the one from destruction gives a sign of hope but also cries out against the erasure of the many. It is the story of the one, Jesus who shall be called a Nazarene, which will continue as the Gospel story unfolds. The two opening chapters have, however, alerted readers to the tension in this text which seeks to subvert imperial and patriarchal power. Of course, in its very subversion, Matthew still carries the traces of that power which can be reconstructed from contemporary reading sites characterized by oppressive power, patriarchy and destruction of Earth.

Conclusion

This reading started out as an experiment or what I called an ‘urgent experiment’. I wished in this essay in honor of R.S. Sugirtharajah to insert an ecological perspective into the postcolonial and feminist reading nexus that he had already acknowledged. Drawing on the creativity of poets and artists using the images of the kauri and the long white cloud, powerful symbols within my current habitat of Aotearoa New Zealand, and combining this with a multi-lensed reading of the familiar biblical account of the birth of Jesus, I sought to invite readers into a new story, a new way of telling the old story. I considered this urgent because of our need for a new ecological imaginary. It is my hope that a reading such as I have suggested would contribute to the shaping of this imaginary and the transformative praxis which could flow from it not only in Aotearoa, land of the kauri and the long white cloud and colonized land/colonized people, but around our cosmos, wherever this gospel is proclaimed (evoking Mt. 26.13).

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ELEMENTAL BONDS: SCENE FOR AN EARTHY POSTCOLONIAL THEOLOGY

Mayra Rivera

The creative and productive future of postcolonial biblical criticism depends on its ability to reinvent itself and enlarge its scope. It should continue to expose the power-knowledge axis but at the same time move beyond abstract theorization and get involved in the day-to-day messy activities which affect people's lives.

R.S. Sugirtharajah (2008: 64).

Elemental bonds: the phrase appeared to me strangely, just a flickering thought as I meditated on images of the divine speaking from a burning bush. Dry ground and perhaps some leaves, the shining sun and a small fire, an insignificant bush and a man about to be drawn into a remarkable story. This scene shines in the imaginations of many generations of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim theologians as an enticing depiction of God's awesome presence in the ordinary—divine glory.

The Bible offers numerous images of the divine encountered in the midst of the day-to-day activities of people's lives and in non-human elements. But theology has all too often ignored the earthy qualities of such theophanies, just as it has neglected its own material ground. Moving too quickly past bodies and matter to pursue a dream of salvation undisturbed by the complexities of flesh, it has even fantasized about salvation from materiality itself. As a result, our senses have become numbed and frequently fail to perceive the divine in the elemental. Do we feel the reverberations of the breath-spirit (*ruach*) moving on the surface of the waters as the beginning of creation? Can we see the cloud that guided the people of Israel through the day, or feel the warmth of the pillar of fire that kept them company in the cold nights? Do we ever hear the whirlwind as it debates with Job?

In the burning bush, with its elemental references to fire and ground, I seek an image of divine glory that inspires earthy reverence. But for all its appeal, when approached with ecological concerns in mind, the image of a burning bush also glares with ambiguity. The celebrated fire suggests connections with the less than glorious 'natural' disasters of the recent past. Wildfires, hurricanes, droughts, and tsunamis are fresh in our memories; not only fire, but the elements in general evoke fears of destruction—for good

reasons. Whether such disasters are named ‘acts of God’ or not, they are not simply ‘natural’. Complex questions of the effects of human practices in such elemental conflagrations can hardly be suppressed, especially since combustion and consumption are central aspects of life under contemporary forms of empire, indeed, its driving forces. The seemingly natural scene of Moses at the burning bush is thus disturbed as we consider the quality of our relationships to the elemental, for we are never simply passive spectators of this epiphany or mere recipients of a message from divine-flames.

In light of the mutilation of the most elemental bonds of the world, I read R.S. Sugirtharajah’s call to reinvent and enlarge the scope of postcolonial criticism and to keep grounding it in the complex realities of contemporary life as an invitation to respond to the ecological crisis of our times. In his recent assessment of the field, ‘Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation: The Next Phase’, Sugirtharajah restates his commitment to postcolonial criticism: ‘As long as there are empires, dominations, tyrannies and exploitations—either rising or resurfacing—postcolonial criticism will continue to have a vigilant role to play’ (2008: 52). He further challenges his readers to ‘recover the practical projects and recommit... to addressing the crises that affect the contemporary world’ (2008: 52). Among such crises, Sugirtharajah names terrorist attacks and asylum seeking; this essay proposes that the ecological crisis is a fundamental concern for postcolonial criticism, one that reveals the breadth and depth of destruction caused by human practices promoted by today’s empires.

Postcolonial theologies in the twenty-first century are called to make more explicit the complex effects of imperial ideologies and practices not only on the lives of human beings, but also on the non-human world. Or, more accurately, we need to make explicit the effects of imperialism in the relations that constitute creaturely life. The development of an ecologically conscious postcolonial theology—perhaps we could call it an earthy postcolonial theology—entails the investigation and critique of contemporary imperialisms as well as a creative reimagining of cosmic relationships, carefully engaging scriptural and theological images of God and creation, in the hopes that they can spark elemental wisdom.

Gods of Empire

The current political climate has led to the troubling resurgence of the gods of empires and their imitators, Sugirtharajah observes (2008: 73-77). In the aftermaths of so-called ‘natural’ disasters, as in the wake of terrorist attacks, the gods of judgment are summoned to public contests which purport to choose the mightiest one between them as well as to select between objects of divine judgment; that is, to decide between the possible Jonahs to be forced to carry the burden of guilt for divine judgment

and bear the weight for our deliberately ignored vulnerability. Whether the accusations fall on ‘the non-Christians’, ‘the infidels’, or ‘the godless liberals’, on the media, homosexuals, or wall-street elites, images of angry gods issuing judgment, dispensing punishment, and reasserting their power and control over the world dominate the scene. ‘What we have witnessed has been the fragmentation of the modernist, singular monotheistic god and the emergence of many deities in Hindu, Christian, Muslim and Buddhist forms. These gods and goddesses were vying with each other not only to get attention but also to demonstrate which was the angriest of them all’ (Sugirtharajah 2008: 73-74). The emergence of these multiple gods does not spell the end of monotheism, but rather another competition for control over it: a plurality of monotheisms. Monotheism supports the ideologies of conquest and violence reflected in such battles among judging gods, Sugirtharajah argues, and furthermore it occludes the complexities of contemporary everyday life. ‘Monotheism is managed by a rigid thinking that requires stark choices between right and wrong, truth and falsehood. This kind of stark choice is unhelpful to people whose lives are inherently untidy and their experiences marked by messy and mixed-up realities’ (2008: 57).¹ Thus, Sugirtharajah invites postcolonial criticism ‘to revisit the colonizing monotheistic tendencies present in the biblical narratives’—and in theology—and embrace a multiplicity consonant with the ‘diverse nature of our modern living and the diverse nature of our experiences of the divine’ (2008: 56, 57).

Sugirtharajah’s proposed intervention in monotheistic discourses is crucial for the development of ecologically responsible postcolonial theologies, for only theologies attuned to the irreducible multiplicity of creaturely life—shaped each and every moment by human and non-human others, and thus never simply one—can do justice to its messy and mixed-up realities (2008: 57). In contrast, the logic of the One subsists only by repressing the singularity of real bodies, Laurel Schneider argues in *Beyond Monotheism*, an incisive analysis of the logic of the One and the imperialistic fantasies that haunt monotheism. ‘The story of the One denies fleshiness and the stubborn shiftiness of bodies; it cannot abide ambiguities and unfinished business; it cannot speak syllables of the earth’, she writes (Schneider 2008: ix). Indeed, the simple god of monotheism is ‘a masquerade, a projection out of the fluidity and flux of divine creation’, a theological abstraction that needs the One-Many divide to split divinity from the multiplicity of creation (Schneider 2008: 138).

1. Fumitaka Matsuoka similarly observes the limitations of monotheism to nurture Asian Americans. ‘For Asian Americans, our epistemology begins with the notion that reality is multiple.... The Christian use of butsudan, Buddhist family altar, points to this difference. The depth-reality is not one but many’ (2008).

Postcolonial theologies are certainly suspicious of those gods whose simplicity mirrors the zeal for oneness of empires; and monotheism has effectively protected and promoted the primacy of the One. Yet the complicated relationship between the one and the many cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between monotheisms and polytheisms. Sugirtharajah refers, for instance, to the complicated histories of supersessionist ideologies that have inflected our understandings of monotheism and polytheism and implicate both terms in the One-Many divide (2008: 56-57). Thus, a theology that seeks to resist totalizing impulses cannot proceed simply by claiming many divinities or many creaturely realities. Schneider proposes a logic of multiplicity, which she insists, 'is not the same as "the many"'. Multiplicity 'does not refer to a pile of many separable units, many "ones"' (Schneider 2008: 142). It is not the opposite of the One; rather multiplicity 'results when things—ones—so *constitute* each another that they come to exist (in part, of course) *because* of one another' (Schneider 2008: 142). A theology of multiplicity thus begins from an affirmation of embodied life characterized by fluidity and change, by porosity and interconnection, by elemental heterogeneity (Schneider 2008: especially 153-81).

Elemental Insights

A focus on the elements may help postcolonial theologies to bring to the fore the fluidity, porosity, and interconnection that constitute all life. Because they are utterly material and ubiquitous and yet vital and also always beyond the full control of human beings, the earthy elements are clearly non-anthropocentric images, resistant to homogenizing idealisms that tend to blind theology to the plight of the non-human world and the sacredness of its elemental bonds.

Even before the times of Socrates, philosophers drew inspiration from the elements to think cosmically. The elements named vary from culture to culture; the Greeks considered earth, air, water, and fire—often called the pre-Socratic elements—the building blocks of the universe and of human existence. They theorized that matter evolves from the interaction *between* the elements. 'The unity of things' was thus conceived as a 'consequence of the plurality and harmony of their elements' (Grosz 2002: 205). The combination of the elements was believed to constitute the very basis of subjectivity as well as 'the relations pertaining to the social and natural world' (Grosz 2002: 205). The elements influenced both the human and non-human world, affecting, for instance, the disposition of particular persons. In these ancient philosophies the irreducible relationship between matter and thinking was joined precisely in the theorization of the powers and effects of the elements.

The elements are therefore an ideal site to which Luce Irigaray returns to 'expose the limits to which the male philosophical tradition submitted when

it lost interest in the sustaining elements of the Pre-Socratic world view' (Chanter 1995: 163). In her close readings of philosophical texts, Irigaray traces the dependence of those works on the material elements that they fail to acknowledge. She goes so far as to describe metaphysics in general as a 'forgetting of the elements'—a shortcoming that her work seeks to correct (Oliver 2007: 127). Irigaray explains: 'I wanted to go back to the natural material which makes up our bodies, in which our lives and environment are grounded: the flesh of our passions' (cited in Grosz 2002: 172).

Although Irigaray's main focus has been on the effect of forgetting the elements in the relationships between men and women, today, as we seek to respond to an unprecedented ecological crisis, some theologians have turned to the elements themselves with new zeal: taking its ground seriously. Ellen Armour draws from Irigaray's work to call for constructive, 'nonanthropomorphic ways of conceiving the divine' (Armour 2006: 52). Armour argues that the pre-Socratic elements are what Irigaray calls 'sensible transcendentals', because they 'embody a material transcendence' (Armour 2006: 52). The elements are transcendent in relation to us because we are utterly dependent on them for our existence, 'and yet they exceed our grasp' (Armour 2006: 53).

The search for the materiality of transcendence articulated by liberation theologies has also occupied postcolonial theorists. Gayatri Spivak has most explicitly expounded its theoretical significance in her vision of a planetarity. In response to the increasing abstraction promoted by globalization and the resulting attempt to reduce the planet to a singular economic value system—another example of the logic of the One—Spivak proposes that human beings reimagine themselves in relation to the planet as a transcendent Other. The planet here is not independent from, but rather includes human beings and the socio-political forces we call the 'globe'. Yet this radically inclusive reality, while inextricable from our very existence, remains unmistakably 'underived from us' (Spivak 2003: 73). It transcends us, and 'yet we inhabit it, on loan' (Spivak 2003: 72).

Although Spivak is not expounding a cosmological model of divine transcendence, her proposal that, 'we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities' (Spivak 2003: 73) resonates with such a theological vision. As planetary creatures, humans are indelibly marked by their relationship to and responsibility toward the earthly Other of humanity, in all its complex multiplicity. In this view of ethical responsibility, the planet is also sacred. Sacredness for Spivak does not entail 'a religious sanction, but simply a sanction that cannot be contained within the principle of reason alone' (Spivak 1995: 199). Such view of human relationship to the planet leads Spivak to speak of a *sacred* planetarity. She assumes, however, that the major world religions can no longer ground such visions of sacred earth,

for they have been ‘too deeply imbricated in the narrative of the ebb and flow of power’ (Spivak 1999: 382-83).

Yet there is still planetary nourishment flowing from Christian traditions—although mainly from traditions at the margins of the religious establishments. For instance, Leonardo Boff’s reading of the Genesis creation narrative suggests just such a structure of planetary transcendence. Boff observes that in the creation story, human beings are created last; the world is already there to witness the becoming of the first human beings. ‘Humanity did not see the beginning’ (Boff 1995: 46). This fact of birth is the ground of our responsibility, which does not derive from human choice. ‘The responsibility is anterior to [human] freedom and is inscribed in its creational liberty’, Boff concludes (Boff 1995: 46).

Spivak’s view of planetarity reclaims a sense of transcendence *in* the world that may lead theology to a renewed sense of reverence for that in which we live and find our sustenance, instead of fixing our eyes on the imagined realms of unchanging being where we have often exiled the divine. Affirming divine transcendence in the world around us is, of course, not to say that the earth or the elements are a kind of god, nor does it entail construing its transcendence or its otherness as absolute difference or separation from humanity. I have elsewhere explored the constructive potential of Spivak’s planetarity for a theology of relational transcendence—where transcendence is experienced in the irreducibility of creaturely difference (Rivera 2007). Schneider’s vision of divine multiplicity further emphasizes the porosity and material interconnections of creaturely life, where things interpenetrate and co-constitute one another. In these relational models, planetarity is sacred and underived from us—but it is not One. Planetarity cannot be split from creaturely multiplicity, for it can only be conceived in relation to the planet’s inherent porosity, fluidity, and elemental heterogeneity. The relational and vital character of the elements resists fusion into oneness and helps disrupt the common tendency to objectify the earth.

Focusing on the elements is not an essentialist return to an idea of nature. Postcolonial theologies cannot abandon the relentless deconstruction of ‘the natural’ as a foundation for racist, patriarchal, and homophobic ideologies that lend legitimacy to imperialisms. The elemental does not take us back to such fixed fundamentals (Keller 2007). An elemental theology does not seek to extricate a referent called nature from cultural representations, but rather attend to the messy relationships between cultures and their elemental grounds. It thus admits that theology is never innocent, unmediated reflection of ‘the planet’ or ‘nature’, but as Spivak’s concept of planetarity, these terms seek to highlight the materiality of transcendence—however imperfectly. In Boff’s holistic view, the very term ‘ecology’ ‘encompasses not only nature (natural ecology) but culture and society (human ecology, social ecology, and so on)’ (Boff 1995: 9). Ecology focuses on the ‘interdependence and

interactions of living organisms' (Boff1995: 9), a relational approach that resonates with the ancient vision of the elemental continuity in human and non-human relations I mentioned above.

Despite the justified concerns of a postcolonial theory about the homogenizing impulse of dominant talk of the common—the common origin, the common market, the common language—the common must still be imagined, if only for the sake of the one planet that sustains us. Why not 'let earth itself be the ground'? Catherine Keller proposes (Keller 2007: 65).² Such a ground does not afford the fixity or rigidity of foundations that anchor imperial hierarchies or illusions of theological certainty, for indeed this earth is never fully graspable or controllable, but a rich 'elemental matrix' (Keller 2007: 66). The elemental is not a foundation. Yet a theology that grounds itself on the earth, a development of what Rosemary Radford Ruether called a 'conversion of our intelligence to the earth' (1983: 89), avoids the progressivist tendency to construe getting grounded as punishment. As Sharon Betcher writes, 'Among those who are wise to the earth, 'getting grounded is actually a very ancient and widespread wisdom for "centering" and restoring spirit, for fitting a body back into its elemental and social niche. Getting grounded re-minds us to "think with the weight of the earth"' (Betcher 2007: 317). Think with the weight of the earth. *Kabod*, the Hebrew word translated as glory, means literally 'weightiness'—an apt term for an elemental divine presence that draws us closer to earth and startles us with a vision of the ordinary.

Moses at the Burning Bush

An image of earthy-divine glory draws us back in time and space, not to the ancient Greece of the pre-Socratic philosophers, but to the desert. Mount Horeb, the mountain of God, where an encounter with the divine ignites an Exodus. We do love the Exodus narrative, especially those of us with a certain weakness for progressive impulses: confronting rulers, transgressing boundaries, leaving behind a place of oppression, venturing through dangerous deserts. An irresistible adventure! Yet Sugirtharajah has warned us of the costs of early liberationist fervor for the exodus narrative, which too often led to the celebration of the conquest of the Other in the name of an interventionist God (Sugirtharajah 2001: 27-28; 2002: 103-123). A postcolonial stance, he argued, is mindful that the Bible contains elements of bondage and disenfranchisement, in addition to liberative strands. 'What

2. Likewise, Karen Baker-Fletcher, who takes us back to the 'Spirit hovering over depth meeting earth/ swirling wind and love', seeks common ground on and with the earth (2006: 54). The soil, Baker-Fletcher observes, is not nothingness, but 'the original elements that make up cycles of life, death, and rebirth' (2006: 74).

postcolonial biblical criticism does is to make this ambivalence and paradox clear and visible' (Sugirtharajah 2002: 101). Acknowledging ambivalence and complicity in the text and in the reading, interpretation carries on. As Spivak argues, 'a literary habit of reading the world can attempt to put a curb on... superpower triumphalism only if it does not perceive acknowledgment of complicity as an inconvenience' (Spivak 1999: xii). Thus a postcolonial theology does not flee the scene of biblical interpretation; it rather attends to all of its intricate connections. In this respect, the scene of Moses at the burning bush may be read as a figure of the elemental ties intrinsic to the story: simultaneously political, theological, and ecological. The incident is not yet an adventure, but a gentle if complex moment. A warm encounter takes place, one that grounds the ensuing movement in the 'relative stabilities of creation' (Keller 2007: 65).

Moses, who has apparently been enjoying his self-imposed exile in Midian, decides to lead his flock 'beyond the wilderness', and comes to Horeb unaware of what he would find there: God in her element (Exod. 3.1). Moses just notices that a bush is blazing. The sight is strange: a bush is burning, but it is not consumed. So Moses decides to come closer to find out why.

As Moses stares at the fire, so do we. We keep returning to the scene to contemplate that particular burning bush, as if attracted by a timeless fascination with fire. We keep staring at the flames as if recognizing in it our element—Prometheus-like? A strange pleasure: we are mesmerized by the dancing flames, drawn to its warmth, soothed by its hissing and crackling sounds. What is the source of such attraction? Do the flames enkindle our deep longing for a habitat where the fire of the sun feels close to the skin, where its presence touches? Do the flames awaken memories of the flesh, or of the comforting warmth of home? Or is this enchantment rooted in more ancient memories of solar energies shared by all earthy creatures?

Such questions allow me to relate to the scriptural references to fire as a manifestation of God. But such manifestations are often terrifying, and thus fire is not a popular element among contemporary theologians. For instance, in Mark Wallace's inviting reading of spirit in the elemental plurality of the creation, fire is associated with judgment and purification (2007). Compare this depiction with that of the other elements. As earth, Wallace argues, the spirit is divine dove and a fruit bearer; as air, it is 'vivifying breath that animates all living things', as well as the prophetic wind of salvation; as water, the spirit 'refreshes all who drink' (Wallace 2007: 295-96). In a list that includes the comforts offered by the fruits we eat, the air we breath, the water we drink, it may not be accidental to find fire mentioned last—and timidly. Judgment and purification are not precisely warming.

These implicit reservations collude with the images of dangerous wildfires to make fire a not-so-popular element. And yet, despite the common ambivalence toward fire, we can hardly ignore its blazing force in scriptural

theophanies, or the allure of the Pentecostal flames. Images would surely multiply and so will their theological significance once we get closer to the flames. The well-known images of the pillar of fire that accompanied the Israelites in the desert and the burning bush remembered in the continuous fire of the bush-like *menorah*, also evoke a protecting warmth whose term in Hebrew, *esh* ('fire'), mimics its hissing sounds. *Esh*. According to some rabbis, fire was the source for the creation of the heavens, and all that comes directly from God *is* fire—including the law, which was said to be black fire engraved on white fire (Heschel 2005: 333).

Contemporary science offers a similar vista. In Brian Swimme's description of the big-bang, the universe 'flared into existence around thirteen billion years ago as a super-dense concentration of *energy*, trillions and trillions of degrees hot, and then quickly develop into the first atoms'. Then suddenly, 'these atoms... join together to form the galaxies and the stars', which then 'developed in their core all of the other elements of the universe. These elements then formed new systems, star systems, such as our own sun and Earth and Mars and so forth' (interview recorded in Crossland 2003). Such was our fiery beginning, which is still part of us. 'The sun is in us', David T. Suzuki adds, 'released in our cells by processes of combustion. It's the energy of creation, taken up as sunlight, released as fire' (interview recorded in Crossland 2003).

Fire also appears as an overwhelming force, however, feared as the very judgment of God. The ancient Greeks emphasized this double nature when they distinguished the destructive fire (*aidelon*), associated with Hades, from the creative fire, associated with Hephaistos. And sometimes there seems to be a dramatic difference between them. We now know, however, that the destructive and creative powers of fire are inextricable from each other. Fire ecologists argue, for instance, that wildfires are crucial for the regeneration and survival of forests. These are, of course, not just any fires, but regimes of fire tailored to the specific needs of an ecosystem. Rhythmic cycles of drying and wetting, fire and growth. Therefore, controlling fires can be as damaging as lighting them unwisely.

Fire itself is not a substance, but a relationship. It is an interaction between other elements: between oxygen in the air and organic material, which in turn comes from earth, water, and solar fire. And there is certain 'reciprocity' between fire regimes and the plants which they naturally burn. Stephen Pyne, professor of fire history at Arizona State University, explains that fires have their own habitats. 'Some plants survive, for example, by protecting their vital organs from heat'. Others 'use the heat to their advantage: some re-sprout from roots or branches after fire has incinerated their outer limbs.... Other plants opportunistically seize a site temporarily purged by fire to promote their own reproduction' (2002). What appears as destruction is often part of a cycle of renewal.

Human beings have nonetheless appropriated fire and shifted the balance toward consumption. Pyne observes that ‘about 200 years ago, we shut fire up and put it to work. With furnaces and internal combustion engines, we built the modern world. Now, we have lost touch with the sources of power. We think energy comes from a pump, instead of the sun’ (2002). Thus we no longer treat fire with respect—and have forgotten the ancient rituals for its use. Pyne continues, ‘We’re still fire creatures—never more so—but we’re not part of any process of renewal’ (2002). In contrast to the wildfire regimes I described before, there are no cycles in human patterns of burning, no moment at which we allow the earth to rest and re-generate.

We have also taken fire out of their habitats, in disregard for long-established relationships, consuming even the seeds of restoration. Pyne observes that the US ‘is recolonizing its once-rural countryside’:

This recolonization has kindled a new fire frontier that eerily inverts the old. Instead of agricultural encroachments, we have urban ones. Instead of a landscape laden with combustibles as a result of logging and land clearing, the scene bloats with inflammable structures amid an overgrown biota. Instead of fires rushing into forest reserves, fires roar out of reserves and into the exurbs (2007).

Without respect, even reverence, for relationships, a source of creative power becomes a force of destruction. We fear that destructive force, and there are always some who, in the name of Christianity, blame God for firing elemental energies toward ‘sinners’, while conveniently ignoring the power of their own elemental relationships. They seem to forget that the destruction of relations—human and non-human—ignite inexhaustible *strange* fires. (This was painfully illuminated in the failed responses to and blasphemous justifications for the destruction following Hurricane Katrina). Human and non-human relationships cannot be neatly set apart.

An interest in just relationships led early liberation philosophers and theologians back to the Mountain of God to contemplate the burning bush. They focused on the bush itself, as if restating a question from an old Midrash: ‘Why did God choose to appear in a *bush*?’ The Rabbi answered: ‘Had he appeared in the carob tree or a sycamore, you would have asked the same question. However, it would be wrong to let you go without a reply’. So the rabbi responded: ‘to teach you that no place is devoid of divine presence, not even a lowly bush’ (Plaut and Stein 1981: 407).

The lowly bush was the key for Enrique Dussel’s reading of this epiphany (Dussel 2003). He argued that this scene portrays the revelation of God in those excluded from systems of power. The poor, the Other ‘is the “locus” of God’s epiphany’ (Dussel 2003: 139). This is the significance of the image of Moses facing a burning bush in the midst of the desert: it epitomizes for Dussel the face-to-face encounter with the Other. The Other beyond sight interpellates the self, like God in the burning bush. The Other calls the self

to see (and thus move) beyond the boundaries of the systems of domination, which requires openness to a surplus of meaning in common reality. Only thus can there be a possibility for welcoming transcendence in the finite existence of the human Other.

This key philosophico/theological reading of scripture exemplifies a 'search for the materiality of transcendence', which, Marcella Althaus-Reid observes, is at the heart of Latin American Liberation theologies (2004: 394). However, in its early phases, the materiality that mattered usually had a human form. Surely, the human faces in question were concerned with the very material effects of socio-economic ideologies. And yet, the focus was clearly the human face. (This is, of course, no longer the case, as evidenced in the works of Latin American liberation theologians like Boff [1995] and Ivone Gebara [1999]).

What I am pursuing here is not to turn away from the encounter with the Other that this epiphany represents. I would like to suggest instead that we retain the specificity of this particular encounter and focus on the fact that it is *in* a thorny bush that Moses sees and hears the divine *as* fire. If, as the Rabbi insisted, the burning bush teaches us that no place, even a bush, is void of the divine, then may we not contemplate this as a vision of the elemental force in all things, which does not consume creation, but gives it life? God dwells in the humble. But the metaphor of dwelling can be misleading if by it we mean that there is an accidental or external relationship between the divine and physical reality. The divine is in a flame that envelops an ordinary bush, and in all creatures, as an enlivening element that does not consume—not unlike the power of intracellular combustion that warms us, moves us, and connects us to other solar creatures as to the sun.

As in other scriptural epiphanies, the medium is in large measure the message. Fire is an element of change, of becoming. Indeed, lacking its own substance, fire is nothing but relational transformation. Technically fire *is* not, fire *happens*. As observed above, fire is a reaction between elements: air, earthy matter, and the always mysterious, impermanent spark. It seems quite appropriate to its non-substantial element that the divine flame identifies itself with a famously identity-defying statement: 'I am who I am'; or 'I will be who I will be'.

When God appears to Moses, God had been touched by the cries of the Israelites groaning under slavery. The cries ascended to God. Unlike the God of classical theology, the God of Moses is no unmoved mover. Although we commonly hear references to Heb. 12.29, 'God is consuming fire', in this epiphany, what may melt is the idea of divine apathy. I would even suggest that the divine here burns with elemental passion. *Compassion*. As the heart of fire, the divine burns with non-consuming desire, just like the lover in the Song 8.6 whose love is raging flame (NRSV). At that particular moment,

the divine flame that was the very life of the bush became visible: it caught Moses' attention—and his heart. Its light and heat drew Moses into divine passion. The spark was then in Moses as it was in the bush—a holy spark. But I'm getting ahead of the story here—we need to touch ground again.

The theophany glows not only in the thorny bush, but also on the ground around it. 'Come *no* closer!' (Exod. 3.5).³ God responded, when Moses said 'Here I am' (Exod. 3.4). Perhaps in a first lesson about non-consuming love, Moses was asked to remove the sandals from his feet to stand on holy ground (Exod. 3.5). Can this ground—dusty and common—shine with divine glory as well? Is there also an earth-epiphany suggested in this passage?

This 'Come no closer!' may be read as a demand for Moses to keep his distance from the elements (so Moses is being grounded—in the punitive sense). But I'm persuaded by a more tactful request. A Hasidic saying instructs: 'Only when one is barefoot can one feel the little stones underfoot. Moses was to lead his people in such a way that he could feel their smallest sorrows' (Plaut and Stein 1981: 407). May we hear God's voice not as a demand to keep our distance, but to feel even the smallest sorrows of the earth? Becoming better attuned to the pulse of the earth, grounded, like the bush, in the dusty matters of life, we can also heed the request to approach the earth gently in order to encounter the divine in the elemental relationships of the day-to-day practices of our lives. Sparked by the same non-consuming passion of the God of the mountain, shall we not take off the things that hurt the planet—most likely not our shoes, but our cars—and also those that isolate our bodies from the pain of the earth?

Conclusion

The bushes are burning, and some of our prophets are inflamed, desiring not to rescue people from a particular land, but to contribute to healing the earth's elemental bonds. Liberation struggles surely await, but we hope none of them will entail an absolute Exodus. Instead of dreaming of dramatic escapes from materiality, an earthy postcolonial theology becomes grounded in the complex, messy, elemental relationships of planetary life—where the bush, the ground, and the holy sparks are part of us—they are within us as we are in them. It rediscovers the inextricable connections between political, theological, and ecological: deepening its reading strategies and critiques of empire to denounce the mutilation of the elemental bonds of our world and attuning itself to traditions of reverence toward fire, water, air, and earth. Postcolonial theologies may thus accept Sugirtharajah's invitation to 'recover the practical projects and recommit...

3. I'm reminded here of Jesus' words to Mary Magdalene outside the empty tomb: 'Do not hold on to me!' (Jn 20.17).

to addressing the crises that affect the contemporary world' (2008: 52)—with non-consuming passion.

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