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Postcolonial Studies and the Hebrew Bible

BRADLEY L. CROWELL
Drake University, Des Moines, IA
brad.crowell@drake.edu

ABSTRACT

As the field of biblical studies continues to become more diverse, scholars incorporate theories and methods from other areas of research. One of these fields is postcolonial theory, which makes the role of empires and their effects on society and literature the primary focus of the interpretive effort. This essay explores how postcolonial theory is currently being integrated with the study of the Hebrew Bible. Biblical scholars incorporating postcolonial theory focus on three major areas: how colonial empires interpreted the Hebrew Bible and how indigenous populations reacted to the colonial interpretations, interpretations from previously colonized populations, and the role of empires and reactions to them in the composition of the texts of the Hebrew Bible.

Keywords: empires, Hebrew Bible, hermeneutics, historical criticism, postcolonialism

1. *Introduction: Postcolonialism in Biblical Studies*

The field of biblical studies has undergone some radical changes over the past quarter of a century. The once dominant method of historical criticism has been questioned, critiqued, ignored, and outright rejected by some in the field. As biblical studies becomes an increasingly diverse discipline, it incorporates scholars of various backgrounds, training, and ideological positions. Biblical scholars from different backgrounds are increasingly employing a range of cultural and advocacy criticisms to illuminate the biblical text, its world, and subsequent interpretations of canonical literature. Historical criticism, which gained prominence in the field during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and remained the foundational

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critical approach throughout the twentieth century, lost its position as the sole arbiter of appropriate interpretations in recent years, as the field has democratized and expanded. This new collection of critical approaches, including feminism, liberation theology, ideological criticism, identity-specific readings, and Marxist criticism, has in the past decade been joined by postcolonial criticism. In the broader academic discourse, such figures as Edward Said (1978; 1993), Gayatri Spitvak (1987; 1999), and Homi Bhabha (1990; 1994) have provided a broad collection of theoretical concepts to expose the ways in which colonial powers have constructed and controlled the identities of subjugated peoples, and how that has shaped the postcolonial experience. New Testament scholars have used postcolonial concepts since the mid-1990s, but scholars of the Hebrew Bible are only beginning to incorporate the observations and methodological approaches of postcolonialism. In the following article, I will survey the ways in which postcolonialism is currently being used to interpret the Hebrew Bible. This review is not intended to be comprehensive; rather, it traces the contours of the terrain of how this important new approach is beginning to influence the academic discourse on the Hebrew Bible.

At the outset, it is important to briefly discuss the term 'postcolonialism'. When postcolonial analyses were beginning to be recognized in academia during the late 1980s and 1990s, there was a debate concerning the use of a hyphen in the term. The term 'postcolonialism' was reserved for discussions about the field of theoretical discourse, while the hyphenated 'post-colonialism' was understood as a chronological period designating the time after independence from a colonial power was achieved. This distinction is important, but in recent studies the two terms are often used interchangeably (for the debate see Ashcroft 1996; Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1998: 186-92; Thieme 2003: 122-24). Since this distinction is rarely made in biblical studies, I will use the term 'postcolonialism' as is common in the field.

Postcolonial theory arose out of specific critiques of the effects of colonial practices on the people subjected to imperial rule. Frantz Fanon (1925–61), a psychologist and writer from Martinique, wrote within the colonial and postcolonial arena of the Algerian independence movements (see Fanon 1952; 1961). Edward Said (1935–2003), a Palestinian educated in Cairo and the United States, attacked the colonial construction of the 'Orient' and its continuing impact on the postcolonial context of the Middle East (see Said 1978; 1993). While these postcolonial analyses critiqued the effects of Western capitalist empires, particularly the British Commonwealth, the theories and methods of postcolonial critiques quickly

crossed disciplinary barriers and now range from Medieval (Ingham and Warren 2003; Cohen 2000) and ancient Greek studies (Bradley and Wilson 2006; Hurst and Owen 2005; Malkin 2004) to studies of colonial literature and research into colonial archives. As in these other fields, which are only beginning to implement postcolonial analyses, biblical scholars have also recently incorporated postcolonial theoretical concepts into their work (see the discussions in Sugirtharajah 2001; 2002; Segovia 2005; Moore 2005; Liew 2005).

While there is no agreement on a precise definition of postcolonialism, the unifying element for all postcolonial studies is its penetrating critique of colonial expansion and domination, and the lasting effects on the people and institutions subjected to its rule. Since postcolonial analyses explore issues as diverse as nationalism, ethnicity, gender, colonial relations and political asymmetry, any single definition of the theory is necessarily reductive. Loomba (1998), for example, devotes an entire chapter to exploring the intricacies of the term. Postcolonial criticism as a practice attempts to shift the focus of literary and cultural analysis, in order to expose the conditions of the colonial experience, and the methods that colonial subjects have used to construct their identities and expressions within their literature and cultural products.

2. *Postcolonialism in Hebrew Bible Studies*

As the process of democratization and globalization continues to influence biblical studies, those working in previously colonized regions, as well as scholars from those colonized countries now at western academic institutions, are producing studies of the effects of the colonial experience on interpretations of the Hebrew Bible and, to a lesser degree, on the production of the biblical texts themselves (Segovia 1995a; 1995b). Postcolonial biblical scholars utilize concepts and methods from a range of related approaches, including liberation theology (Sugirtharajah 2005b), feminism (Ringe 1998), and Marxist criticism (Boer 2005; Jobling 2005). But in biblical and theological studies, the postcolonial approach is most closely related to liberation theology, which attempted to speak for oppressed minorities, whether in a colonial situation or as a minority within a majority culture (see Sugirtharajah 2001: 203-43). Liberation theology, which began in the 1960s in Latin America, initially sought a universal theology of liberation for all oppressed peoples. Local community groups, taking up this approach, read the biblical text in light of their more specific cultural interests, in order to strip it of oppressive ideologies, and reconstruct their own

liberated identity. As liberation theology became more visible to minority groups within other cultures, these groups used this perspective within their own specific situation. In the late 1980s and 1990s, identity-specific readings began to appear from a wide range of minority groups, such as Native Americans, feminists, and African Americans (see Sugirtharajah 2003; Segovia 1998; Bailey 1998).

In recent years, postcolonial approaches have encroached on the dominance of liberation approaches in representing the theological voice of these minority groups. According to Sugirtharajah (2001: 239-43; cf. 2002: 102-23), one of the leading proponents of postcolonial biblical criticism, liberation theology was a modernist project that attempted to replace the grand narrative of divine right to rule with another grand narrative of liberation. However, postcolonial readings allow interpreters to critique these narratives and even criticize the ideology of the biblical writers themselves. A key example of this difference is liberation theology's use of the Exodus story as its key narrative of liberation. Postcolonial readings highlight, and criticize, the lack of emphasis placed on what happens after the Exodus—the conquest and extermination of the Canaanite population.

While the diversity of postcolonial studies hinders a strict classification of postcolonial studies and the Hebrew Bible, Sugirtharajah (2001: 251-55; cf. 2002) and Segovia (1998; cf. 2000a) have identified three methods of integrating postcolonial studies with biblical studies. First, postcolonial biblical criticism interrogates the interpretations and uses of the Bible produced by modern empires of the fifteenth through twentieth centuries (Segovia 1998: 58-60; Sugirtharajah 2001: 255). Archives, newspapers, personal accounts, biblical commentaries, and sermons are searched to identify and expose how imperial powers and biblical interpreters were complicit in reading the biblical text for colonial purposes. Second, previously colonized groups produce their own readings of the Bible within their cultural, postcolonial environment (Segovia 1998: 60-63; Sugirtharajah 2001: 252-55; Moore and Segovia 2005: 6-7). These readings explore how the Bible can be read within this postcolonial context, and they attempt to disrupt conventional hegemonic interpretations. Finally, postcolonial biblical criticism scrutinizes the biblical text for its own colonial entanglements (Segovia 1998: 56-58; Sugirtharajah 2001: 251-52; Moore and Segovia 2005: 7-8). This is typically understood as a historical-critical enterprise that takes the social and cultural environment of empires seriously, and exposes colonial forces at work within the biblical compositions themselves.

a. *Colonial Interpretations*

Throughout the history of Western imperial expansion, the Bible was at the center stage of the ideological colonization of subjected groups. Commercial and territorial colonization went hand-in-hand with the major missionary movements of the seventeenth through twentieth centuries. The establishment of missions, Bible translation, religious education, and conversion of subjected people were all part of the larger colonial projects. In the past decade, Sugirtharajah (2001; 2005a) has advanced the field of postcolonial biblical studies by illuminating the promulgation, reception, and interpretation of the Bible during this colonial period. The postcolonial approach to studying the use of the Bible in colonial interpretations specifically evaluates the history of interpretation for the use of the Bible in either supporting the colonial structures or subverting them in indigenous interpretations. In his volume (2005a), Sugirtharajah, for instance, explores newspaper accounts, diaries, sermons, commentaries of the time, colonial records and historical treatises to expose how the Bible was interpreted and used in the service of colonial aspirations.

The time of colonial expansion coincided with the Victorian era, and the hermeneutical approaches developed at this time were used by preachers, scholars and politicians. This method of interpretation involved the assumptions of the time—verbal inerrancy of the Bible and its direct applicability to current situations (see Sugirtharajah 2005a: 91-96). Although this era also was the time of the beginnings of the historical-critical approach to the Bible, preachers usually studied the text theologically rather than critically. The factuality of miraculous accounts in the Bible—a worldwide flood, the talking donkey of Balaam, Jonah's three days in the belly of a fish—were rarely questioned. Since God was understood to be the single divine author of the Bible, every story and injunction became a foundation for understanding the identity, current situation and future goals of the readers.

Texts were usually understood in both a literal and typological way (Sugirtharajah 2005a: 92-93; 2001: 61-73). An event or situation in the Hebrew Bible was interpreted literally as referring to a specific time in the history of Israel. Yet, those same narratives served as a 'type', or parallel to later times, the current situation of the readers. A common application of this approach was the christological interpretations of the Hebrew Bible; stories were understood to give an account of the history of ancient Israel, but they were also seen as 'types' or precursors of the life and times of Jesus. Within these colonial interpretations, a biblical verse could be applied directly to the colonial situation in a literal way. The world of the Bible became the world of the interpreter—the colonizing power was on God's side and par-

allel to Israel, while the subjects were often presented as opposed to God, and parallel to the Canaanites.

Many examples of how this interpretive method was used to apply passages from the Hebrew Bible within colonial discourse could be gathered (Sugirtharajah 2005a), but one illustrative event was the colonial response to the 1857 insurrection of Hindus and Muslims in British controlled India (Sugirtharajah 2005a: 60-97). After a series of religious and political reforms ordered by the East India Company, segments of society in northern India rebelled against the colonial forces. The response to the uprising of 1857 among preachers both in colonial missions and in the British homeland illustrates how the Hebrew Bible was being interpreted and used at this time. Passages from the Hebrew Bible were deployed both to call the British to repent, and to justify an immediate and brutal response to the uprising.

The British portrayed themselves during this episode as sufferers at the hands of their enemies. Sugirtharajah (2005a: 63-68) collects sermons from preachers throughout Britain who declared that the national sin of not spreading the gospel in India was now resulting in divine judgment in the form of the rebellion. Sermons in the following months called for a day of national prayer that should include fasting and repentance for this sin. The sermons focused on a variety of verses from the Hebrew Bible (Ezra 8.21; Isa. 58.7; 2 Chron. 20.3; Jon. 3.5) that demonstrated that when leaders called on the people to pray and fast, God responded by alleviating the situation. The Queen of England responded to these calls by declaring a national 'Day of Humiliation'. One key text during this period was the book of Esther (4.16; 9.31), in which prayer and fasting preceded the successful thwarting of Haman's plot to exterminate the Jews.

Sermons of the time also turned from calls for prayer and fasting to subtle, and not so subtle, demands for revenge (Sugirtharajah 2005a: 69-81). One biblical narrative used in this way was an account in 1 Sam. 11.1-11, where the king of the Ammonites was threatening to gouge out the eyes of the Israelite inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead. When word of the threat reached King Saul, he responded by marching against the Ammonites and massacring them. The message to those who heard such sermons was all too clear: the British in India were now under threat from their villainous opponents, and retaliation was biblically mandated (2005: 69-70). Calls for vengeance continued in Britain, and other passages from the Hebrew Bible were seen as appropriate 'types' to justify it. One such text was the rape and dismemberment of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19–20. After a group of Benjaminites demanded that the Levite be handed over to the mob, the

Levite sent out his concubine instead; and she was 'raped and abused all night' before returning to the door of the house. The Levite, preparing to leave the next morning, found her there. He traveled to his home, cut her into twelve pieces, and sent them to the tribes of Israel. Retaliation soon followed. Some preachers in Britain saw this story as an exact parallel with the situation they were currently facing in India, and demanded a similar retaliation (2005: 77-79). The preachers felt that the colonizers, like the Levite's concubine, were ruthlessly attacked without provocation, and the response from the British should be just as ruthless.

As in other colonial situations in which the Bible had a significant role, the book of Joshua served as the justification for violence against indigenous peoples. The complexity of the issue of war in the Bible was overlooked, and Joshua was chosen as an apt parallel to the situation in India (Sugirtharajah 2005a: 88-91). With Britain being portrayed as corresponding to the ancient Israelites, and the Indians as the corresponding Canaanites, the brutal retaliation and even extermination of the rebels could be justified based on biblical precedent. Joshua's conquest was similarly employed as justification for the colonization of Latin America, South Africa, and Palestine (Prior 1997). The colonial myth portrayed the indigenous people as inferior, and in need of civilizing. This legitimated the 'civilization' or 'evangelization' of the indigenous groups (1997: 177-84).

b. *Colonial Interpretations*

The story of Joshua and his conquest of Canaan is one of the most traumatic for postcolonial interpreters. While liberation theology focused on the Exodus from Egypt as a salvific event for the poor and oppressed of Israel (see, for example, Pixley and Boff 1989), postcolonial readers highlight the end result of the conquest of Canaan and the extermination of its people. Tamez (2005) points out that the story of plagues sent by God against the Egyptians was used by Spanish interpreters of the conquest of the Americas as justification for the death of innumerable indigenous peoples. Likewise, the conquerors insisted that the new territories were a gift from God, just as the Promised Land was a gift from God, and they must destroy the idolatrous people as Joshua destroyed the Canaanites. Other scholars, including Palestinians (Said 1986; Ateek 1992) and Native Americans (Warrior 1989), have read the conquest of Joshua from a colonized perspective. In spite of the attempts to exterminate the Canaanites and drive them from the land in the book of Joshua, the Deuteronomistic History itself contains 'hidden transcripts' of their persistence in the land. One example is the Medium of Endor (1 Sam. 8.3-25), who, Donaldson argues (2005: 106-11),

was of mixed Philistine and Canaanite heritage, yet persisted in the face of the earlier Israelite conquest.

Sugirtharajah (2001) has also highlighted the role of indigenous interpretations of the biblical text, that is, how colonial subjects subversively read the Bible and appropriated it for their own purposes. Indigenous, colonized readers of the biblical text, which over the course of colonial occupation was translated and distributed in the colonies, began to read and interpret the Bible according to their own traditional methods. These readers saw their own cultures, traditions and rituals revealed in the biblical text and began to interpret it according to their own methods, which Sugirtharajah (2001: 175-200; 2002: 43-73; cf. Richard 2002: 308-14) identifies as 'vernacular hermeneutics'. Indigenous readers used three methods of reading that were not familiar to colonial readers, methods that the colonial readers usually saw as inappropriate when compared to their own historical-critical interpretations. First, indigenous readers would seek conceptual correspondences between texts or concepts from their own cultures and those found in the biblical texts (Sugirtharajah 2001: 182-86). Second, they would place some of their own tales, legends, and traditions alongside the biblical stories and injunctions, and interpret them together in order to struggle with issues raised in those stories. This is a process that Sugirtharajah (2001: 186-88) calls 'narrative enrichments' or 'cross-textual reading'. Third, indigenous readers would draw 'performantial parallels' between behaviors and rituals in their own culture and those illustrated in the biblical text in order to explain the Bible in their own terminology and conceptual worldview (2001: 188-90).

During the colonial period, these methods of interpretation were employed by colonized readers to synthesize the Bible with their own indigenous religious traditions. These methods of reading were used not only to understand themselves, but also to subvert the dominant (historical-critical) mode of reading associated with the colonizers. Sugirtharajah (2001) has identified several important indigenous readers and groups who interpreted the biblical narratives according to these methods, and thereby promoted liberation from, or, at times, subversion of, the dominant understanding of the biblical text.

One example of an indigenous reader who often reread texts of the Hebrew Bible in new ways was Olaudah Equiano, an emancipated eighteenth-century slave (Sugirtharajah 2001: 75-87; 2002: 53; cf. Carretta 2005). Equiano was born in Nigeria, but sold into slavery at the age of eleven. He was taken to North America and purchased by a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, who renamed him Gustavus Vassa and trained him to be a

sailor. He was eventually sold to a Quaker from Philadelphia, who taught him to read and write, and allowed him to purchase his freedom. After traveling extensively, Equiano went to England and joined the Abolitionist movement. He quickly became a popular speaker and was encouraged to write his life story, which was published as *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, in 1789.

Equiano's appropriation of the biblical narratives was a key point of contact between his audience and his message of emancipation. In recounting his life story, Equiano drew distinct parallels between his life and the story of the Israelites (Sugirtharajah 2001: 78-79). He saw his life unfolding in three phases. His early life in the villages of western Africa was compared to the stories of the patriarchs and their wanderings toward the Promised Land. But, at eleven, Equiano was captured and forced into slavery, a period of his life that he understood as parallel to the Egyptian captivity of the Israelites. Equiano was then freed from his bonds of slavery, an ideal parallel to the liberating stories of the Israelite Exodus from Egypt.

It is not unusual for indigenous groups to draw direct parallels between their experience of oppression and the biblical narrative of ancient Israel. Another example is the Miskitu (see Hawley 2002: 336-38), an indigenous group in Nicaragua who were converted in the mid-nineteenth century by Moravian missionaries, although Catholicism now plays a significant role in their society. During their war alongside the Contra rebels against the Sandinistas in the 1980s, the Miskitu regularly used imagery from the Hebrew Bible to portray the Sandinistas as oppressive and anti-God. The Sandinistas were depicted as various imperial powers—the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Romans—who were oppressing the Miskitus. On the other hand, they also identified the Sandinistas with Canaanites and Philistines, dangerous enemies who must be driven out. The Miskitus, like Joshua, were waging a holy war against the Sandinistas.

Equiano's use of the biblical text was often far more subtle than drawing direct parallels between events in his life and the Bible. He also alluded to the biblical text without quoting it directly. By using allusions instead of direct quotes, he could evoke a biblical story, creating a sense of intimacy with his biblically literate audience, and sometimes subvert the original meaning by transferring it into a new context (Sugirtharajah 2001: 79-82). An example of his allusions is a reference to the prophet Micah, which states that God desires his people to 'do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before God' (Mic. 6.8). Equiano referred to this verse to indict the eighteenth-century slave trade for its injustice toward his people. He

also explained direct ritual and cultural correspondences between life in ancient Israel as reflected in the Hebrew Bible and that of his people in Africa. According to Equiano, they practiced the same rituals (circumcision, sacrifice, purification), and festivals. They even had similar ways of naming their children after specific events or circumstances. Equiano also taught that Israel and his people had the same form of government, with tribes, chiefs, wise men, and elders. By using the stories and verses from the Hebrew Bible in this way, Equiano spoke to his audience in terms they could clearly understand. He also subverted their practice of tolerating and promoting slavery, using the same book his audiences had employed to justify slavery, to instead indict their colonial injustice.

One of the most pressing issues for postcolonial religious communities in previously colonized territories is the translation of the biblical text (Sugirtharajah 2002: 155-78). Christianity came to these regions simultaneously with the colonial expansion. Its evangelical desire to distribute its sacred book in the language of new converts led to struggles with the converts' languages and worldviews. The process usually involved taking concepts from indigenous religions that were close to those promulgated by Christianity, and using them to translate the biblical texts. This would often result in the suppression and alteration of the indigenous concept in favor of the colonial one. Mbuwayesango (2001; cf. Yamaguchi 2003) analyzes how this happened when British missionaries arrived in Zimbabwe in the late 1800s. Before the arrival of the colonists, there were many tribes in Zimbabwe united by the belief in a supreme god known in the Shona language as 'Mwari'. Missionaries to the region struggled to find a concept that was similar to the Christian understanding of the divine. Mwari was understood as the supreme god, who was transcendent and creative. While there was much debate and many experiments with this concept among the translators, they decided to use 'Mwari' as a translation for Elohim and Yahweh. This decision suppressed local creation stories in favor of those described in the early chapters of Genesis. Yahweh is often portrayed as a male god in anthropomorphic language, undermining the transcendent and ungendered view of Mwari within the indigenous religions. The translations also effectively usurped Mwari's relationship with the people because, like Yahweh, the Shona god then became exclusively identified with the Israelites of the Hebrew Bible. While there are now calls for new translations and rewritten Bibles, the process of translation had a dramatic and irrevocable effect on the colonized populations and their understanding of the sacred world.

The analysis of colonial uses of the Hebrew Bible, and the postcolonial effects of the spread of the biblical literature by these colonizing powers,

is an essential aspect of postcolonial biblical interpretation. However, this is a specialized task requiring knowledge of and access to colonial materials that are unfamiliar to most traditionally trained biblical scholars. Yet, without the realization that biblical interpretation was used, and sometimes continues to be used (see Sugirtharajah 2007), in the service of colonial interests, these modes of interpretation could continue to be propagated without the proper contextualization within the historical and interpretive settings in which they developed.

c. *Postcolonial Interpretations*

The way that indigenous groups and colonized subjects appropriated and interpreted the biblical text during the colonial period aids in understanding the variety of ways that current interpreters in postcolonial situations read and utilize biblical narratives, poetry, prophetic oracles, and injunctions. As more biblical interpreters are present in regions that were previously colonized, their readings are becoming more available, and are increasingly critical of the impact of Western colonialism on their society, and of the Western academy's readings of the biblical text. Many of these scholars continue to use methods common in Western readings of the biblical text—historical criticism, feminism, literary criticism, social-scientific research—but they also bring new perspectives to the text. Minor literary characters are elevated, previously inexplicable rituals are discussed, indigenous texts are brought into dialogue with the Bible, and colonial structures and interpretations are exposed.

There are several primary modes of reading the Hebrew Bible by postcolonial scholars to reveal the colonial structures imposed on indigenous readers and to critique previous methods of interpretation. Two of these methods of interpretation are 'Encultured Reading', in which a scholar highlights their postcolonial environment to reinterpret the biblical text, and 'Cross-textual Reading', when a reader purposefully juxtaposes stories, tales, poems or other traditional texts and the biblical text to illuminate a new understanding of the Bible within the postcolonial setting (see Sugirtharajah 2001: 186-88).

1. *Some Examples of Encultured Readings*. When the biblical text is read through eyes that have been dominated by oppressive colonial structures, characters and ideas that may appear insignificant in Western interpretations, and perhaps for the biblical writers themselves, take on new, heightened importance. One woman in the biblical text who was first highlighted by postcolonial feminist interpreters is Queen Vashti from the book of Esther.

In the opening chapter of the book of Esther, Queen Vashti was called upon to perform a dance for a banquet thrown by the Persian king for his visiting dignitaries. She refused and was immediately dispatched, opening the position for Esther. Masenya (2005; cf. 1998), an African scholar from South Africa, uses the story of Vashti and Esther to outline her *bosadi* ('womanhood') approach to biblical interpretation in an 'African-South African' context. After a brief summary of the story of Vashti, informed by historical criticism, Masenya turns to a personal account of two African-South African pastors' wives who denigrate Vashti while teaching that the women should follow the example of Esther. For Masenya (2005: 189), her context as an African reader is more significant than the historical context of the biblical text, so she uses this personal story to critique the position of women within post-apartheid South Africa where they have been doubly colonized—by the colonial situation and by the patriarchal system. Masenya notes that although by position Queen Vashti was a powerful woman, by gender she was still powerless. The author of Esther is also to blame, because Vashti is introduced merely as a foil for Esther. The author denigrates a woman from another ethnic group to exalt a woman from his own.

Other postcolonial biblical scholars use biblical texts to grapple with issues arising within their own postcolonial contexts. Lee (1999a), for example, illuminates some of the debates and struggles of the post-exilic community in Third Isaiah by reading it within his context of Hong Kong after the territory was turned over to China by the British in June 1997, when it became a 'Special Administrative Region' of China. After 150 years of British colonial rule, the people of Hong Kong have a hybrid identity; they are culturally Chinese, but live with legal, administrative, and economic structures imposed by the British. Lee proposes that the returnees from Babylon also had a hybrid identity. The returnees were taught of their land and Jerusalem, but lived in Babylon, where they were influenced by the colonizer's system. Lee's Hong Kong experience enhances how he reads Isaiah, which becomes the site of conflict between the majority left in the land of Judah and the returning deportees. The exiles had a hope of deliverance, expressed in Deutro-Isaiah (40.1-4; 43.19; etc.), which turned into a nightmare when they returned to Judah (Isa. 55–66, Haggai, Zechariah). Lee uses Third Isaiah to demonstrate that the returnees were not homogeneous in their views of foreigners. In other post-exilic texts, like Ezra 4.2-5 and Nehemiah 3–4, foreigners are excluded from building the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. Yet, in Third Isaiah, foreign nations are generally viewed positively (Isa. 56.3-8; 66.18-24). As in the postcolonial experience in Hong Kong, there is tension between different groups with different

interests, but these transitional experiences can be exciting and dynamic times of rebuilding the new identities. Lee's article sparked considerable debate and discussion about postcolonialism, biblical interpretation within previously colonized territories, and the role of the biblical text itself (see Chia 1999; Kwok 1999; Sakenfeld 1999; Segovia 1999; Lee 1999b).

Another recent trend in postcolonial biblical studies is for scholars to read from a 'hybrid-identity'-specific location (Sugritharajah 2002: 179-99; Segovia 2000b; Isasi-Díaz 1995). Theological and biblical scholars from previously colonized regions who are now in western, usually American, academic contexts struggle with their hybrid identities living as outsiders in a dominant culture. This method of reading is becoming particularly prominent among Asian-American (see Liew and Yee 2002; Liew 2002; Kuan and Foskett 2005) and South African scholars (see Punt 2003; Holter 2000). One example is U. Kim's (2002) reading of Uriah the Hittite. Kim sees an affinity between the position of Uriah and his own hybrid identity and liminal status caused by being a Korean-American. Uriah the Hittite was a foreigner, but still a native of Jerusalem, married to an Israelite woman (Kim 2002), and a loyal Yahwist—a hybrid Israelite. He is doubly marked in the biblical text as a foreigner who serves both Yahweh and the king. Yet in the narrative, David does not hesitate to act against Uriah because Uriah is not an Israelite. In this story, David is the one who acts like the 'barbarian' by killing Uriah, a career soldier who happens to also be a foreigner. Kim compares this narrative to his own current Asian-American struggle for identity, and to the treatment of Asian Americans in the larger context.

U. Kim has also written one of the few books incorporating postcolonialism with an analysis of the Hebrew Bible. In *Decolonizing Josiah*, Kim (2005) engages in an extended critique of Western biblical scholars who have infused their biblical interpretations with orientalist and imperialist views, along with Western concepts of nationalism. The majority of this book is Kim's construction of an Asian-American hermeneutic, in which he criticizes concepts of history, historiography, and historical-critical approaches to the Deuteronomistic history. He uses his Asian-American hybrid identity to illuminate the results of colonial attempts to construct the Other with a politics of liminality (2005: 182-206). Kim interprets the Deuteronomistic portrayal of Josiah not as a nationalistic outburst of violence and expansion, but as a symbolic and ritualized attempt to incorporate northern refugees from the conquered kingdom of Israel into a collective Judean identity focused on Jerusalem and the Temple. For example, in Kim's interpretation of Josiah's attacks on Samaria and Bethel, Kim suggests that they 'can be

understood not as a historical account, but as a ritualized anti-pilgrimage, as a ritual of identity formation' (2005: 231).

Some scholars in postcolonial contexts also bring indigenous religious concepts into their hermeneutical enterprise to understand and sometimes problematize biblical interpretation. While this form of interpretation does not usually deal directly with the colonialism, it is a result of postcolonial practices, in that it views indigenous religious ideas as being parallel to, and therefore as authoritative as, biblical concepts. H.C.P. Kim (2001), for instance, reads the Hebrew Bible from his stance as a Chinese-American, and uses the concept of yin-yang to exegete biblical texts. The yin-yang, the dynamic opposite but complimentary manifestation of the Tao, is used to express a 'both-and' multi-dimensional hermeneutic—both synchronic and diachronic, both text and intertext, both text-oriented and reader-oriented. In his 2001 article, Kim applies this method to Genesis 1 and 2. He notes the historical-critical results of two sources, the Priestly source (Gen. 1.1–2.4a), which depicts God as a transcendent creator, and the J or Yahwistic source (Gen. 2.4b-25), which portrays God as an immanent, anthropomorphic deity. Kim reads these narratives not as evidence of different theological communities or historically discrete instances of Israel's faith, but as a complex text that depicts God as a majestic yet caring deity. He sees this mode of reading as emphasizing a dynamic view that trends toward harmony, balance, and reconceptualization.

Liew (2001) defines this 'yin-yang' mode of reading differently, investing the interpretive principle with a more ideological dimension. While Liew applies this hermeneutical principle to the New Testament book of Mark, the refinement of H.C.P. Kim's approach is important. Liew reads to expose and implicate oppressive binaries within a context of colonial and postcolonial oppression. Liew sees 'yin-yang eyes' as an oppressive stereotype applied to Chinese-Americans. For Liew, reading with 'yin-yang eyes' means reading from a marginal situation that negotiates and exposes the binaries that continue to have power in postcolonial situations and in traditional biblical criticism.

2. *Some Examples of Cross-textual Readings*. One of the most common methods used in postcolonial interpretations of the Bible is what Lee calls 'cross-textual interpretation' (2005: 195-97). This approach places two or more texts into dialog so that they become mutually illuminating. Typically it is done so that an indigenous narrative can highlight a new perspective on the biblical text. In 'Mothers Bewailing: Reading Lamentations', Lee places various accounts of the Chinese experience of the Tiananmen

Square incident in May and June of 1989 (he calls it 'Text A') alongside the biblical book of Lamentations ('Text B'). Typically, historical-critical scholarship on the book of Lamentations understands ch. 3 as the core, where historical-critical scholars attempt to identify the anonymous 'I' who is the target of the suffering brought about by Yahweh. But Lee suggests that this emphasis reflects the ideology of the interpreter, which seeks to avoid the emotional and mournful response of Widow Zion in chs 1 and 2. Lee sees this as a complicity of interpreters with the ideology of the text: Zion deserves to be punished. He goes on to bring the book of Lamentations into dialog with eyewitness accounts and poems of Chinese mothers who lost children during the military crackdown at Tiananmen Square. In this context, it is not Lamentations 3 that is the focus of the book, but it is Mother Zion lamenting her loss. Her cry is the hermeneutical key to the book. Lee continues with his cross-textual reading by juxtaposing emotional accounts of the incident at Tiananmen Square with various sections of Lamentations. Lee effectively decenters the historical-critical reading of Lamentations by reinvesting the cries of the personified Zion with the Chinese laments of mournful women suffering the loss of their children.

The relationship between Abraham's wife, Sarah, and his Egyptian slave, Hagar, has been a key text for feminist readings of Genesis. McKinlay (2005; cf. 2004: 112-36) uses a variety of techniques from feminist criticism and postcolonial analysis to engage this story and give a fresh, emotional voice to the experience of Hagar. After performing a 'first reading' of the text, noticing typical historical-critical and literary motifs in the story, McKinlay highlights the emotional silence of Hagar. In order to give a voice to this silence, McKinlay integrates another deeply emotional text, Luce Irigaray's *Elemental Passions* (1992), in order to hear the emotional subtext of the narrative. But McKinlay is also writing in a postcolonial context in New Zealand, which deals with the powerlessness of indigenous populations and issues of identity. So, she integrates a story of colonialism and its emotional complexities for those in the shadow of the empire. The story is that of William Colenso, a missionary who had a child with a Maori woman. Although he paid a price for his loyalty to his son, Wiremu, he maintained his integrity by caring for the child. McKinlay, however, returns to the biblical text and explores how the story of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar functioned in the time of its composition and editing (for McKinlay, the post-exilic period). She notes how the text is influenced by the rivalry between Egypt and Persia, and how it agrees with the attitudes of Ezra-Nehemiah concerning the exclusion of foreign women. McKinlay then explores how the narrative is 'double-voiced': Ishmael and Hagar are

pitiable, excluded characters; yet, later in life, Ishmael becomes a fiercely independent warrior; and Hagar, in fact, is the first character in the book of Genesis to be forced to wander in the wilderness, a motif continued throughout the Torah.

Several readings by postcolonial scholars effectively decenter the exclusive claims on religious authority of the biblical text by juxtaposing it with religious texts from their own cultures. While such a practice is illuminating, in that it demonstrates that biblical themes and emphases are common in other religions' literature, it can also aid in better understanding of the biblical text. The parallel reading of the texts subverts the exclusivist approaches of colonial readings of the Bible in colonized situations. One such reading is Lorgunpai's (1994) exposition of the book of Ecclesiastes from the perspective of Thai Theravada Buddhism. Ecclesiastes is a text that Western Christians tend to find out of place in their canon, because it speaks of the futility of values they support, while Buddhists find great similarities to their own teachings. Lorgunpai reads Ecclesiastes alongside the Buddha's Four Noble Truths. As Buddha taught that suffering (*dukkha*)—pain, misery, emptiness, the transitoriness of life—is universal to human experience, so the author of Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth) highlights the futility of life. Buddha taught that suffering was caused by desire and attachment to things that are impermanent; similarly, Qoheleth is tortured by his realization that he will leave all his possessions to another and that life is fleeting (2.18-19). The two traditions diverge on the ultimate goal of life: in Buddhism it is Nirvana, the extinguishing of desire, or nothingness; while in the tradition of Qoheleth, the goal is enjoyment of life as one lives it (2.24). Lorgunpai goes on to note further differences between the traditions, and to call for the book of Ecclesiastes to become a common ground for dialog between Thai Christians and their Buddhist neighbors. Another example of this type of cross-textual reading is Rayan's (1989) juxtaposition of the traditions of the book of Job, the Hindu Bhagavad-gítá (Radhakrishnan 2002), and the poems of Gítánjali (Ghei 1992), who died of cancer, to explore the similarities and differences of the human response to suffering.

Today, readings from previously colonized situations constitute the most productive and rapidly growing area of postcolonial biblical criticism. Both biblical scholars in non-Western academic contexts, and those from colonized territories now at work in Western institutions, are engaged in this type of reading. These readings have both a positive and negative aspect. They critique previous interpretations within a colonial context, as well as the hegemony of historical-critical approaches. They also attempt to reconstruct a 'decolonized' biblical hermeneutic and theology.

d. *The Hebrew Bible and its Colonial Entanglements*

Most biblical literature was composed in the context of imperial rule; yet, the effects of that situation are rarely explored by biblical scholars. Each of the empires—Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome—had different strategies of domination, but they all had aspirations to control much of the ancient Near Eastern world, including Israel and Judah. Until recently, little work has been done on the strategies and mechanisms of imperial control, although scholars have recognized the importance of these empires for historical-critical research. New Testament scholars have investigated the role of the Roman Empire in the world of Jesus, the writings of Paul, and the visions of the Apocalypse (for instance, Horsley 1997; 2000). Scholars of the Hebrew Bible, perhaps because the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian empires are less intensively studied than Rome, have only begun to analyze its literature within an imperial context. The field of postcolonial studies can give scholars interested in the role of empires in the ancient biblical world new analytic perspectives, and a set of critical questions to bring to the biblical text.

A pertinent issue for postcolonial biblical criticism is the relationship between historical criticism and postcolonial criticism. Questions are raised from each side about the applicability of the methods, and theories of the other. The theories, methods and results of historical criticism gained prominence within the context of colonial expansion, with one of the major hallmarks of colonial hermeneutics being the historicization of faith (Sugirtharajah 2001: 70-72; Segovia 1998: 34-35). Colonial interpreters viewed the biblical religion as the historic faith and all other, non-biblical, religions as degenerate and in need of deliverance. While the religions of the colonized viewed texts as a medium of religious truth and not as the primary means of acquiring that truth, the colonizers saw the Bible as the revelation of their faith. For the subordinated religions, interpreters engage with the texts for their emotive and spiritual power, not to learn about authors, history, and sources. In colonized territories, the historical-critical method eclipsed all other forms of indigenous interpretation like allegory, symbolism or metaphor (Sugirtharajah 2001: 72).

As the diversity of approaches for biblical studies and practitioners in the field increased in the 1980s and 1990s, historical criticism lost its dominance as the only legitimate approach to historical and religious truth in the Bible (Vander Stichele and Penner 2005: 21). Yet, many in the field of postcolonial biblical criticism continue to use historical criticism as part of the interpretive method, because it does expose the historical and material matrix in which the biblical text was composed. Others argue that histori-

cal criticism can be a method that liberates interpreters from certain forms of theological dogmatism (Stenström 2005). Some postcolonial critics use the method as an approach that can expose the debates and motivations implicit within the text, or as a source to interact with the background of the biblical text. But the attacks on historical criticism from some scholars are insightful and powerful arguments for an understanding of the method as one that developed in colonial situations (Segovia 1995a). Susanne Scholz (2005), for example, argues that it is an imperialist tool, especially when used to explain, and in a way validate, an offensive text by referring to the authorial intention and historical context ultimately to support the perspective of the author. Scholz gives the example of various feminist scholars who discuss the rape laws in Deut. 22.25-29 to explain how the rape of Dinah (Gen. 34) or the rapes of Bilhah and Zilpha (Gen. 29.31–30.24) are not really rapes because of the patriarchal nature of the ancient society. While Scholz's indictment against interpretive complicity with imperial perspectives is powerful, the method itself continues to be used both by liberation theology and postcolonial critics to expose and sometimes reject those ideologies within the text.

Scholars trained in historical-critical methods are also beginning to incorporate the observations, theories and methods of postcolonial criticism (see Marshall 2005). The critical apparatus of postcolonialism aids scholars in going beyond philological and historical-critical debates to investigate the effects of the ancient empires on the literature, ideology, and colonial environments in which the biblical text was composed. Horsley (1998: 154-55) contends that the historical-critical perspective, which often reduces the biblical literature to only the religious aspect while neglecting the political and economic aspects of ancient life, remains profitable for postcolonial and cultural approaches. Historical-critical scholars can use the methods of postcolonial theory to uncover the libratory strands within the biblical literature, while interrogating the domesticating and hegemonic attempts of editors. Sugirtharajah (2002: 79-86) argues that postcolonial criticism of the Bible should be employed by historical-critical biblical scholars to expose the ideologies of the texts and highlight their colonial or liberationist tendencies. He identifies four 'codes' in narratives: hegemonic, professional, negotiated and oppositional. Hegemonic texts are those that legitimate and promote the interests of the ruling class, and often embrace colonial ideas in service of their perpetuation of power. Professional texts promote law, centralization, nationalism and religiosity, while neglecting the needs of common people. Negotiated texts interpret events, actions and experiences to meet new situations. Texts written in the oppositional code are often

submerged by those who produced the final edition, but can still be found as the voice of the marginalized. While historical criticism will continue to be utilized alongside a wide range of literary and cultural theories, readers must be cognizant of the interpreter's social location (Patte 1995; Waetjen 1995), and the role of political and social power in the interpretive process (Yee 1995).

While these questions are debated, several scholars have produced important research on the colonial context of the composition of the biblical text with little emphasis on modern postcolonial situations. Chia's (1997) reading of the first chapter of Daniel points out the strategies of the colonizer (Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon), as well as the postcolonial strategies of resistance of the narrator and his characters. The book of Daniel opens by introducing four powers: the king of Judah, the king of Babylon, the god of Jerusalem and the god of Nebuchadnezzar. For Chia, the irony is that Nebuchadnezzar arrogantly thinks that he has defeated Jerusalem and its God, while the narrator gives that power to Yahweh alone. Rejecting Nebuchadnezzar's version of events, the narrator reclaims the past by articulating his own story of resistance to the dominant power of the colonizer. He resists Nebuchadnezzar's version of events and devalues his role as the colonizer; in fact, the author presents the king as a fool. Chia outlines the colonial strategy of Nebuchadnezzar as expressed in Dan. 1.3-7. Nebuchadnezzar segregated the elite from the rest of the population to teach them a new language, educate them in the ways of Babylon, and give the subjugated elite new, Babylonian names—all methods that have been used by colonial powers throughout history. Nebuchadnezzar attempted to devalue their Jewish identity, and instill in them a hybrid identity, which the narrator resists by using the Jewish name of Daniel rather than the imposed Babylonian name of Belteshazzar. Chia goes on to discuss Ashpenaz, the eunuch in charge of Daniel and his friends, who colludes with Daniel to challenge the colonizer's claim to universal power. Chia's reading of this chapter is an insightful example of how postcolonial theory can inform historical-critical and literary readings of the text. It highlights colonial strategies and ideologies by demonstrating how the narrator resisted those attempts and presented an alternative version of events.

In 'Decolonizing Yahweh' (2006), Latvus notes that the colonialism of Assyria and Babylon left an enduring mark on the people of Judah: it changed the society as well as the theology of the people. The Deuteronomistic History, which records Judah's struggle with Assyrian domination, ends with the colonial politics of Babylon. Latvus investigates the colonial context of the final chapters of the Deuteronomistic History (2 Kings

24–25). The author of these chapters had a subordinated attitude, in which the colonial power of Babylon was understood positively: Yahweh brought about the destruction of Jerusalem, and the king of Babylon was a mere tool. Indeed, the Babylonian king is given divine notions: he, like Yahweh, is to be 'served' by the people. The writer, who is linked to the deportees, and not to the poor who remained in the land, blames the destruction on the people of Judah, rather than on the colonial power. Latvus applies the concept of 'inner colonization' to the author, using a comparison with Finland's desire for good relations with the Soviet Union during the Cold War to describe the situation. Ultimately, in the Deuteronomistic History, Yahweh is not a liberator; rather, he is the power behind the colonial forces.

One additional trend involving the integration of postcolonial theory and biblical studies is important. As certain theories and theorists become more prominent in academic circles, various concepts can be employed without reference to their larger theoretical system. With postcolonial studies, key ideas like hybridity, the 'Third Space', and hegemonic discourses, as well as important theorists such as Said or Bhabha, are forming significant arenas of discussion within biblical studies that are not directly interested in the issues of colonialism or postcolonial identities. This is a significant expansion of postcolonial concepts, but it must be noted that colonialism is not a theme in many of these works. Brett's reading of Genesis (2000) consciously uses multiple reading methodologies to highlight the ideologically subversive strands in the narratives of Genesis. Brett's reading strategy, which is inspired by postcolonial theory (2000: 5), employs insights from narratology, anthropology, historical criticism, and postcolonial studies, all of which he understands as contributing to an enhanced interpretation of the text. Brett sees the editors of Genesis, in Persian controlled Yehud, as resisting and subverting the ethnocentric theology in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. One example of this ideology is the prohibition against marriage to foreign women, which is related to the Persian strategy of social control. For Brett, Genesis reveals a 'hybrid inter-subjectivity' that incorporates diverse elements from within Israelite society, and from external, even Babylonian and Persian colonial traditions (2000: 23). But, ultimately for Brett, the sources identified by historical criticism are of little concern, because the editors were engaged with their own current issues, particularly those related to the nature of the authentic Judean community, and the ideology of the rulers sponsored by the Persian Empire.

Another example of incorporating key concepts from postcolonialism is Runions (2001), who integrates theoretical concepts from Bhabha to discuss how ambiguous and indeterminate texts within the book of Micah

influence readers with predetermined ideologies. Runions rejects attempts by historical-critical scholars to 'solve' the problems of the text and find a homogeneous message in the prophetic book. For example, alternating images of conquest, domination, and violence complicate Micah's call to justice. While historical-critical scholars see this as the result of redaction over a long period of time, which Runions does not reject, it is important to highlight these differences without subsuming the alternative voices. Historical issues are ultimately bracketed out of the analysis. For Runions, empires, and their effects on subjugated populations, provide a theoretical backdrop to the construction of a hermeneutic that recognizes difference, as well as subsumed voices, in the biblical text.

Hagedorn's study of the Persian colonial context of the legal material in the Torah (2007) is explicitly oriented toward historical-critical questions, rather than modern colonial circumstances. He draws on a wide range of anthropological studies of legal traditions and empire formation, in addition to some postcolonial theory. Hagedorn analyzes the imperial strategies and ideology of the Persian Empire, including the lack of Persian pressure toward the codification of law within their colonies. He understands the Torah as an instance of 'harmony ideology', or a strategy of compromise and conflict avoidance between the empire and subjected colonies. The authors of the Pentateuchal legal material accomplish this by limiting the legal dictates to the local province of Yehud, while still promoting a distinct identity for the people. Hagedorn's work is an example of how postcolonial theory, drawn primarily from anthropological research rather than cultural criticism, can be incorporated to help analyze important historical-critical problems, and how the ancient imperial situation influenced the production of the biblical literature.

These studies are important attempts to combine various approaches in biblical studies with postcolonialism while maintaining a view, not to the history of interpretation or the role of the biblical text in modern identity formation, but to the text itself and the implications of imperial rule in the world of the ancient Near East. For scholars trained in historical criticism, the theoretical matrix of postcolonialism opens up new possibilities that have yet to be explored. For example, Brett's study of Genesis (2000) is essentially synchronic, focusing on the view of the final editor and his ideological interactions with the colonial desires of the Persian-backed administration of Yehud. The various sources examined in the centuries of historical criticism (J, E, D, and P) could also, however, be explored to determine their reaction to, complicity with, or subversion of, imperial and colonial domination.

3. *Conclusion*

While biblical studies has been appropriately criticized by postcolonial and indigenous scholars for its collusion with colonial and imperial expansion, the field as a whole has slowly begun to implement new research agendas and incorporate critical cultural and literary studies like postcolonialism. With its focus on colonial and imperial discourse and the entanglement and resistance found in the literature and ideologies of subjugated groups, the entire field of biblical research could begin to engage with postcolonial studies. The Bible was composed in a world of empires, so every discipline in biblical studies from the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple studies through the New Testament and Early Christianity could gain new insights into the production of the biblical literature and its world. Likewise, the Bible was subsequently utilized by Western empires as an ideological weapon to both subjugate colonized peoples, and to validate their own tactics of control. In the postcolonial world, the colonizers left a legacy of their own version of Christianity and its sacred texts. Subsequently, the indigenous, formerly colonized peoples have begun to interpret Christianity and its sacred texts according to their own standards, for their own purposes. Postcolonial biblical studies is a fertile field that has opened up new ways of understanding the text and its reception.

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