Werner Kahl (Ed.)

Postcolonial Biblical Hermeneutics
International Perspectives
In October 2018, an international symposion took place at the Academy of Mission (Missionsakademie) at the University of Hamburg, on Postcolonial Biblical Hermeneutics. This was probably the very first academic meeting of international exegetes and theologians on the subject to have taken place in Germany. Scholars from India, Samoa, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Columbia, the Netherlands and from Germany gathered for a fruitful exchange of insights, perspectives and critical questions.

Most of the articles gathered here have their origin in lectures presented at the symposion. Others were revised or written in the meantime and have been included, with the most recent contributions dating from 2024.
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**Introduction: Postcolonial biblical hermeneutics – a healthy challenge to traditional exegesis**

**Werner Kahl**

It is my pleasure to welcome you here at Missionsakademie for our symposium on Postcolonial Biblical Hermeneutics. Missionsakademie is not a bad place for this occasion, since the origin of this institution is linked to the European project of colonizing and evangelizing the whole world. Walter Freytag, then Professor for Mission Studies at the University of Hamburg and the spiritus rector behind the founding of Missionsakademie in the middle of the 1950s, had envisioned this as an academy for the preparation of missionaries to be sent out into the so-called mission fields in Africa, Asia, and Oceania. When he attended the World Mission Conference in Achimota in the newly founded independent Ghana at the end of 1957, he realized that a new era in the relationship between the global South and North had begun. The message from the African side to the Europeans and US-Americans was: We thank you for bringing the Gospel and the Bible to our part of the world, and for the educational institutions and hospitals that you founded. But from now on, we take things into our own hands.

Freytag took the message from Ghana serious. Upon his return to Germany, he changed the purpose and the program of Missions-akademie. From the end of the 1950s it has become an institution for the formation and post-graduate qualification of theologians from the global South. This constellation of PhD students from the global South working on their dissertations in Germany, is also – and especially so from a post-colonial perspective – problematic if students are not appreciated with their own resources and interests. In fact, the negotiation between the expectations of the university advisors and the research questions of the Missionsakademie students is not always smooth, to put it mildly. It would be a desirable procedure if the proposals for PhD-projects from the global South could be refined in a conversation with northern perspectives. All too often, however, German advisors insist on changing research subjects all together. This applies especially to the field of biblical studies. Here, the
expertise and knowledge of exegetes is often still limited to the traditional historical-critical methodology with a focus on establishing the history behind the biblical text, excluding exegetical approaches with an interest in possible meaning dimensions of biblical texts and their actualizations in particular contemporary contexts. In many theological institutions of the global South, it is the relevance and plausibility of exegetical work for the church or wider society, that matters. In the German exegetical tradition, however, the ethos of an interest-free, purely academic and allegedly objective engagement of biblical texts, is still widely celebrated.

At Missionsakademie we have tried to serve as a bridge and communication platform between theological concerns of the South and the North. In the course of time, these concerns have undergone transformations: From the middle of the nineteen sixties until the beginning of the nineties, inculturation theology in Asia and Africa and liberation theology in Latin-America and South Africa were subject matters to be explored and developed. From the nineties onwards, subject matters that reflect global processes of migration have moved center stage, like Pentecostalism, migrant churches, and Christian-Muslim relations.

It has been a – healthy – challenge to listen to and to take seriously the traditions, the life experiences, the interpretations of the Bible and of the world, the expertise and the faith of our colleagues from the global South. Easily, however, also we at Missionsakademie still at times fall into the trap of feeling all too comfortable with the un-critical assumption that our way of doing theology should ultimately serve as yardstick the world over – even though we should have learned from liberation theology that any theological endeavor in any location and time is context bound. As the history of exegetical research teaches us, this also applies to the historical-critical canon of methods. Especially post-colonial theologians of the past two decades have made us aware of the fact that the methods and results of exegetical research in the North cannot seriously claim universal validity. It was, however, initially the impact of cultural studies informed by semiotics in general and sociolinguistics of the 1970s in particular that paved the way for the increasingly accepted insight that all knowledge systems anywhere are bound to cultural conventions. This, however, has been met with great reservation in the German theological discourse in general and in exegesis in particular.
New Testament scholar Brian Blount in his Emory University doctoral dissertation from 1992 on *Cultural Interpretation*,\(^1\) observes from an African-American perspective that New Testament “texts are already interpreted arbitrarily, not according to individual constituent expectations, but according to a perspective of standard white Eurocentric values. [...] (The Eurocentric perspective) represents itself as the only accurate measure of biblical interpretation.”\(^2\) Claiming to be “scientifically” correct, this perspective can be diagnosed not as a neutral endeavor, but as “sociologically and linguistically restrictive and, therefore, ideological.”\(^3\)

Informed by the sociological approach to theology by Enrique Dussel and by the sociolinguistic work of M.A.K. Halliday, Blount intends “to demonstrate that the perspectives of the marginal members of society are excluded from the present methodologies of New Testament interpretation, and that when those perspectives are included, biblical interpretation can have new meaning and impact in both academic and ecclesiastic arenas.”\(^4\)

While in the German speaking exegetical discourse the critical voices from the margins of global economics and academia have been widely ignored, rejected or belittled when they have been heard, post-colonial exegetes have been introduced to the field of theology in Germany recently in publications within the field not of exegesis but of *Intercultural Theology*. Andreas Nehring, professor of mission and religious studies at Erlangen University, has almost single handedly been instrumental in bringing the work of exegetes like Kwok Pui-lan, Fernando F. Segovia, R.S. Sugirtharajah, and Musa W. Dube to the attention of theologians in Germany. This is a recent development that dates to 2012 with an issue of the magazine *Interkulturelle Theologie/Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* dedicated to post-colonial theology,\(^5\) and to 2013 with the publication of *Postkoloniale Theologien. Bibelwissenschaftliche und kulturwissenschaftliche Bei-träge*.\(^6\) Both publications present selected articles of major proponents of post-colonial approaches in theology, in German translation. The sequel *Postkoloniale Theologien II. Perspektiven aus dem deutschsprachigen Raum* was

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2 Blount, Cultural Exegesis, 3.
3 Blount, Cultural Exegesis, 3.
4 Blount, Cultural Exegesis, 3.
5 Interkulturelle Theologie 38,1-2/2012.
6 Ed. by Andreas Nehring and Simon Tielesch, Stuttgart 2013.
published in 2018. It is a collection of responses to postcolonial exegetical and theological studies from German speaking theologians.

The response of the German New Testament scholar Lukas Bormann of Marburg University is quite telling and might be representative for the opinion of a majority of historical-critical exegetes in the North. Since this is the very first paper of a German exegete devoted explicitly to an overall assessment of postcolonial exegesis, I will discuss it in more detail.

First of all, the very title of the paper – Is there a postcolonial theology of the New Testament? – is surprising, for this question runs counter to the very rational of postcolonial exegetical perspectives at the very heart of which lies a well founded suspicion towards any attempt at essentializing and universalizing theology. The questionable dis–cipline of a Theology of the New Testament was founded in the eighteens century in Germany and it has thrived especially in protestant exegesis. It is an expression of the wish to bring doctrinal order into the Biblical variability and disorder of beliefs and faith statements – to the neglect of variability and in disregard of particular cultic and liturgical practices. Postcolonial studies, however, are much concerned with pointing out and understanding inconsistencies, hybridities, particularities, and ambiguities in Biblical writings – without erasing them. Because erasing difference amounts to a colonial atti-
tude in dealing with the stranger – be it a text from a distant era, be it the population of a distant place. It is therefore no wonder that a postcolonial theology of the New Testament has not been produced. A postcolonial theology of the New Testament is an oxymoron.

Bormann comes to the conclusion that there is not “a postcolonial theology of the NT in the sense of an all embracing description of the New Testament world of ideas and in making it relevant for an understanding of the present.” ¹¹ This is meant as a critique of the postcolonial endeavor which according to Bormann fundamentally lacks the ability for in depth critical and historical studies: “The greatest weakness of postcolonial exegesis rests in the fact that it does not provide any space for an academic engagement, nor can it define such space – an engagement that does not predetermine research results, that is stubborn and that works according to the method of a disciplinary logic.” ¹² At the same time, Bormann claims that these criteria were met by traditional historical-critical exegesis. This again is a surprising assumption in view of critical reflection on the history of research and the ideological and theological presuppositions underlying exegetical methodology in the past three decades. Also the contradictory results produced by adherents of traditional historical-critical methods question the academic soundness of the method.

Bormann’s assessment to postcolonial hermeneutics amounts to a fundamental critique of the project. His critique, however, is not well founded, and his argument is flawed. He opines, for example, that there was a lack of relationship between the discipline of Theology of the New Testament and postcolonial exegesis. On the one hand, theologies of the New Testament written by exegetes in the North do not refer to postcolonial studies. “On the other hand,” and here I quote Bormann in translation from the German, “does the compendium Still at the Margins according to its index of names, neither quote James Dunn, Nicholas Thomas Wright, Udo Schnelle nor Rudolf Bultmann. Exegetes are not listed but instead Derrida, Lyotard, Gramsci, Foucault and other theoreticians. Contemporary post–colonial exegesis or theology understands itself as a methodological and theoretical, anti-imperial and positional reading of the Bible which does not concern itself academically with theological ex–egesis.” ¹³

¹¹ Bormann, Gibt es eine postkoloniale Theologie, 201.
¹² Bormann, Gibt es eine postkoloniale Theologie, 203.
¹³ Bormann, Gibt es eine postkoloniale Theologie, 201.
This is a problematic statement, in more than one sense: First of all, the publication *Still at the Margins*, edited by Sugirtharajah in 2008, is not a “compendium”. It is a collection of eleven papers that grew out of an SBL session in 2006 reflecting on developments in biblical studies 15 years after the publication of the ground-breaking essay collection *Voices from the Margin* in 1991. The intention of *Still at the Margins* according to the introduction written by Sugirtharajah is to explore the “negotiation that went on between the mainstream and the margin.”\(^{14}\) It is not concerned with tackling the issue of a Theology of the New Testament, be it in a post-modern or any other perspective. Therefore there is no need for any of the contributors to refer to any version of a Theology of the New Testament. I do not want to be petty, but in this context it is worthy to point out that the name of Bultmann actually does occur in the index of names. Lyotard however, does not! One has to conclude that Bormann only superficially read works of postcolonial exegesis. Had he carefully consulted other major publications like *Voices from the Margin* from 1991, he would have noticed a critical engagement of classical exegesis connected to the names of C.K. Barrett, F.F. Bruce, R. Bultmann, E. Haenchen, J. Jeremias, G. von Rad, G. Strecker, G. Theissen and C.I. Westermann.

Another example is *The Colonized Apostle: Paul in Postcolonial Eyes* (Paul in Critical Contexts), edited by Christopher Stanley in 2011: Here the theologies of Bultmann, Wright and Dunn are critically examined. It is true, the Theology of the New Testament by Udo Schnelle from 2007 is no-where discussed, his name never mentioned. This might simply be due to the insignificance of Schnelle’s work, for scholars from the global South.

In the more recent publication *Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, edited by Segovia and Sugirtharajah in 2007, we find, for example in the section on Romans by Neil Elliott an informed and critical discussion of theological readings of Paul proposed by representatives of the historical-critical paradigm, like, i.a., C.K. Barrett, Hans Bartsch, Ferdinand Christian Baur, J. Christian Beker, R. Bultmann, John J. Collins, James Dunn, Dieter Georgi, Ernst Käsemann, Heikki Räisänen, G. Theissen, Francis Watson, and many more, i.e., the most influential exegetical literature for the question of the meaning of Romans, between Philipp Melanchthon in the sixteenth century and Mark Nanos at the end of the twenties century.

To give you an impression of the careful, well-informed and productive reasoning of Elliott, I quote him here at length:

„According to a ‘soteriological’ reading, Romans is Paul’s presentation of his theology of God’s saving action in the face of universal human sinfulness. Stendahl (1976) and Sanders (1977) have decisively undermined the classical attempt to oppose a Pauline doctrine of justification by faith to a supposed Jewish doctrine of ‘works-righteousness’, and thus ushered in a ‘new perspective on Paul’ (Dunn 1983). Older habits of thought persist, however, evoking a vigorous debate among Latin American interpreters whether Paul’s concern for the justice of God has eclipsed his concern for social justice (surveyed by Tamez 1993: 19–43). In the wake of Sanders’ work, many read Romans as Paul’s charter of theological ‘universalism’ opposed to the ‘particularism’, ‘ethnocentrism’ or ‘national privilege’ of Israel (compare Baur 1873, 1876). While Western interpreters have hailed this ‘universalistic’ reading of Romans as a resource for a genuine multiculturalism (Barclay 1996a; 1996b: 14–15), we must beware the tacit assumption that genuine universalism is best represented by the dominant culture, for history has shown that a purported Christian universalism often serves to bolster ‘a politics of the eradication of cultural embeddedness’ (Boyarin 1994: 218–57; see Fanon 1963: 163). If Paul opposed as ‘ethnocentrism’ his own people’s efforts to maintain cultural identity and distinctiveness against imperial pressures to suppress or obliterate it, how can his theology be construed as ‘good news’ to marginalized communities today, engaged in similar struggles for survival? Should we not rather affirm traces, in Paul and the movement around him, of a ‘stubborn hanging on to ethnic, cultural specificity, but in a context of deeply felt and enacted human solidarity’?“

This is witness of solid exegetical and critical theological reasoning with an innovative view on the question of the possible relevance or irrelevance of Paul’s thinking in today’s world.

It has become clear: Bormann’s treatment of postcolonial exegesis is a mistreatment. He does not do justice to this approach that originated with and has been developed by scholars from the global South. He does harm. His assessment amounts to a misrepresentation of postcolonial studies. By so doing, he unfortunately confirms the observation shared by Kwok Pui-lan in her work *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* from 2005:

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15 Elliott, Romans, 195.
“Once the historical-critical method was established as the norm for studying the Bible, it excluded the validity of other contextual readings and devalued the contributions of non-academic interpretations.”

In the collection Postkoloniale Theologien volume II, there is also an assessment of postcolonial studies from an Old Testament exegetical perspective, written by the younger scholar Simon Wiesgickl, with the title: “Gefangen in uralten Phantasmen. Über das koloniale Erbe der deutschen alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft”. He relies here on some results of his dissertation which was published 2018 under the title Das Alte Testament als deutsche Kolonie. Die Neuerfindung des Alten Testaments um 1800.

As the title of his article already indicates, Wiesgickl has understood what postcolonial studies is all about and he critically evaluates German Old Testament studies in the 18th and 19th centuries from a postcolonial perspective. He detects a general colonialist attitude and ethos amongst Old Testament scholars of the time which respect not only to the contemporary world but also to the world of the Old Testament. Old Testament research at the beginning of the discipline was generally marked by the quest to domesticate the other, i.e. the biblical texts. Scholars at the time where driven by an Ursprungsfanatismus (a fanatic quest for origins): They tried to bring order into chaos, by establishing genres (Gattungen) and by introducing the criterion of originality.

Wiesgickl explores the potential of postcolonial approaches for a development of Old Testament studies. They enable us to identify hidden research interests, ideological agendas, and claims to power in exegesis, past and present. He envisions a fundamental transformation of exegesis once “alternative systems of knowledge and other plausibility strategies beyond the academic mainstream” are taken serious. By applying discourse analysis informed by postcolonial insights, it is possible, according to Wiesgickl, to understanding more appropriately the power dynam-

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16 Louisville, Kentucky, 80. This statement is also part of the section of her work that appeared in German translation in 2012 (ZITh) and in 2013 in Postkoloniale Theologien.
17 Translation: “In the captivity of age old phantasms. On the colonial heritage of German OT studies.”
19 Wiesgickl, Das Alte Testament als deutsche Kolonie, 184.
ics of social contexts in which biblical writings originated and which their authors engaged. Postcolonial exegesis is, however, more than just an addendum to exegetical method. In uncovering the power-discourse of exegesis in history and in present times, it fundamentally challenges Old Testament – and I might add: also New Testament – exegesis.

The postcolonial oriented New Testament colleagues Tat-siong Benny Liew and Fernando Segovia published a collection of articles in 2018, entitled: *Colonialism and the Bible: Contemporary Reflections from the global South.* Segovia in his contribution connects contemporary post-colonial biblical studies to two historic developments, i.e. 70 years of de-colonization and 50 years of liberation theology. He identifies three main subject areas of postcolonial exegetical concern: 1. power relations in biblical writings; 2. power relations in exegesis past and present; 3. the role of the Bible in the project of colonization.

It seems that postcolonial biblical and theological approaches are promising instruments for not only reshaping exegesis but also for reconfiguring relationships between believers of different regions, cultures, and confessions. Due to processes of global migration global Christianity has become dormant also in Germany. The question of cultural and confessional identity or rather identity transformation has become burning in society – not only on the part of the original German population, but also on the part of the migrated populations, and maybe even more so on the part of the new German population whose parents were still born somewhere overseas: How to interrelate in meaningful and productive ways?

Sugirtharajah in 2007 projected the „next phase“ in postcolonial biblical interpretation and he opted for a new hermeneutics which allows for an appreciation of difference and which is applicable not only to exegesis but also for shaping inter- and transcultural relationships in our contemporary world:

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21 Colonialism and the Bible: A critical Stocktaking from the Global South (p. ix-xxxii)
22 Cf. Musa Dube, Translation as cultural explosives
“The culture specific expressions of Christianity which use the language of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism or traditional African religion have become a significant resistant force against a universal form of Christianity which had its origins in Paul and was later perfected by Western Christianity. (...) 

The task is how to construct a hermeneutics based on specific identities without at the same time wallowing in nativistic pride. In this changed theological context, the recovery of denied and misrepresented Jewish Christianity has important implications and supports the postcolonial concern for denied knowledges and agency.”

Sugirtharajah seems to be drawing here on Daniel Boyarin’s critical re-reading of Paul. I would like to combine Sugirtharajah’s request with one of Gerald West’s insights gained in intercultural Bible-Studies in South Africa: The appreciation of difference and the preparedness to become partly constituted by the questions, concerns, and contributions of the other, are fundamental postcolonial concerns. Such an attitude of a critical openness is desirable for encounters both with Biblical writings from antiquity and with their interpretations in past and contemporary times.

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24 Sugirtharajah, Postcolonial and Biblical Interpretation, 458.
Escape and migration in postcolonial perspectives – and its challenge for postcolonial biblical hermeneutics

CLAUDIA JAHNEL

0. Introduction

I am not a scholar of Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics or even Postcolonial Biblical Hermeneutics. My field of studies is Intercultural Theology. But the (postcolonial) interpretation of Biblical texts as well as postcolonial theory in general are central elements in the intercultural theological analysis of interrelations, interminglings, processes of negotiation, cultural and religious changes that accompany the globalisation of Christianity then and now.

What I am interested in – and what I would like to discuss with you today using the example of the discourse on migration and flight – is how religious and theological, including hermeneutical practices impact and interrelate with dominating and subversive discourses in globalised societies, and, especially, how people within these global cultural, religious and social turmoils make sense of and give meaning to their lives.

I have chosen the contemporary public discourse on migration and flight because it paradigmatically reveals cultural and religious negotiations, the revival of colonial discourses and massive identity crises. This does not only mean crises refugees and migrants go through. It is no less a “Crisis of the European Identity”, as e.g. the scholar of migration, Bridget Anderson claims. Anderson recalls that the so called refugee crisis followed immediately after the Eurozone crisis which brought up an awareness of “increasing European poverty”. The coincidence of the two “crises” lead to the perception that refugees are overseas competitors on the economic and labour market in Europe.¹

Migration and flight are forms of the dynamic that stands at the core of Intercultural theological and postcolonial studies: globalisation. Globa-

¹ Bridget Anderson, 630: Migration, https://zingcreed.wordpress.com/2016/09/15/630-borders/ (last access: February 24, 2024)
sation, especially in form of migration and flight, reveals what – following e.g. Kathryn Tanner\(^2\) – is crucial in the postmodern understanding of cultures: that is, that cultures are not self-contained, locally fixed units that differ from other cultures by clear cut boundaries. Rather, cultural codes change in contact with other codes. They – in terms of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari\(^3\) – deterritorialize through globalizing processes: this means the ties between culture and place weaken as cultural ideas leave their “traditional” territories, intermingle, reappear and reterritorialize in new configurations. This understanding of culture has, Tanner claims, crucial impacts on theological questions like Christian identity, unity and diversity, inculturation, continuity or boundary.

My Paper is structured in three parts. I will first highlight some aspects that are in the focus of postcolonial discourse on migration and religion. Second, I will ask how church and theological practices respond to and impact dominating and subversive aspects of this discourse. Special attention will be given to the necessity of re-reading Biblical passages on migration, boarders and hospitality. I will end with some challenges that postcolonial critique on migration and flight poses to theology.

1. **Postcolonial Discourses on migration, flight and religion**

1.1 “Othering”

The current public discourse on migration and refugees reveals a massive revival of the colonial images of the other. Take for example the reaction of the right wing party, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), to the UN declaration “Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration”. The “Global Compact” was prepared under the auspices of the United Nations and is expected to be the first inter-governmentally negotiated agreement on migration (only the US and Hungary stepped out of the agreement which was accepted by UN General Assembly in December 2018). The internet-blog “Fassadenkreutzer” that is very sympathetic with the AfD commented on the “Global Compact” as follows:

“Wherever you look, the highly explosive aspects of this global pact are hidden behind dry, meaningless messages. Thus, a permanent mass immigration

\(^2\) Tanner, Kathryn, Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology, Minneapolis 1997.

\(^3\) Deleuze, Gilles/Guattari, Félix, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Minneapolis 1988.
movement meticulously planned and promoted in a totalitarian manner and kept hidden by the local collaborators rolls towards the essentially unsuspecting people of Europe, in which peoples with their specific superior cultures no longer play a role and finally ‘the last democratic government falls’, as the journalist quoted above, Marian Lau, wrote.\footnote{Der Globale Migrationspakt der UNO kommt auf leisen Sohlen und mit Diffamierungskeule, https://fassadenkratzer.wordpress.com/2018/07/27/der-globale-migrationspakt-der-uno-kommt-auf-leisen-sohlen-und-mit-diffamierungskeule/ (last access: February 24, 2024, tranl.: CJ)}

The contemporary public migration discourse brings back the colonial processes of othering that have been subject of the scrutiny of postcolonial critique in the past decades: first of all the West’s self-entitlement to cultural and epistemological hegemony, and second, deeper down, topics that are concealed by means of the public cultural, religious and political rhetoric: e.g. the global economic inequalities and the lack of distributive justice as main cause for migration and flight; or the human right for a place to live peacefully.

1.2 Binary orders in the processes of Othering

In today’s social imagination we detect the revitalization of the colonial other in the representation of the migrant. He is pictured, Mona Singer states, as a retro-figure of colonial times.\footnote{See Singer, Mona, Retrofiguren des kulturell Anderen. Wider die kulturalistische Viktimisierung von Migrant_innen, in: Gender Initiativkolleg Wien (Hg.), Gewalt und Handlungsmacht: Queer-Feministische Perspektiven, Frankfurt am Main 2012, 181–195.} This “other” has a twofold image which delineates a twofold strategy of othering: the other is either the victim or the perpetrator. The image of the victim is represented today e.g. in humanitarian aid and campaigns like “save the children”.\footnote{https://m.facebook.com/savethechildren/photos/we-will-continue-to-help-refugee-children-regardless-of-ethnicity-religion-or-an/10154846535736597/} Humanitarian aid has become an economic factor and a field of engagement of international companies which do not only profit from their “humanitarian” engagement but also gain prestige.

On the other hand, migrants are presented as a threat – in various ways: picturing them as sick and weak people gives the impression that migrants carry contagious diseases and, thus, endanger the physical health of Europeans. Further, the propaganda of populist movements presents migrants as religious fundamentalists and furthers a paranoia of Islamic invasion.
1.3 Entanglement of religion, conflict, politics and migration
The threatening image of the migrant becomes most effective when reli-
gion is mixed into the picture because the entanglement of religion and
politics is one of the classical “social imaginary” in the Euro-American
context. It calls into account the narrative that the success of the secular
modernity and of the “West” rests on the separation of religion and poli-
tics.

Without going into detail here the public discourse on migration repeats
the double image of religion: on the hand is the good religion – which does
not entangle with politics and is rather rational or inward bound. On the
other hand stands the bad religion – which is the irrational, fundamental-
istic, politically involved religion. This image is projected especially on
Islam. Mahmood Mamdani observes a distinction between the “good Mus-
lim” – presented by disabled Muslim children, raped Muslim women etc. –
and the “bad muslim” – which is the one who is imaginated as someone
who engages in “proactive livelihood and survival strategies” and, thus,
challenges the script that the refugee should be and behave like a victim.
This binary narrative constructs Muslims, Mahmood Mamdani states, as
having “no history, no politics and no debates [ they are] petrifed into a
lifeless custom [...] incapable of transforming their culture, the way they
seem incapable of growing their own food. The implication is that their sal-
vation lies as always in philanthropy in being saved from outside.

1.4 Agency vs. victimhood, positive political practice
vs. negating power
In the discourse on migration and flight portrayed so far migrants and ref-
ugees are constructed mainly as victims and as subject to the aid of the
“white saviour”. In colonial times the image of “the other” as someone who
needed “our” help – including Western civilization and religion – found
its most famous expression in the words of Rudyard Kipplings poem the

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7 Luca Mavelli/Erin K. Wilson, The Refugee Crisis and Religion. Beyond Conceptual and Physical
Boundaries, in: dies. (Hg.), The Refugee Crisis and Religion. Secularism, Security and Hospitality
8 A.-P. S. Mandair/M. Dressler, Introduction: Modernity, Religion-Making, and the Postsecular,
9 Mahmood Mamdani, Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and
11 Mamdani (2005), 767.
“white man’s burden” or Gayatri Spivak’s dictum “White men save brown women from brown men”\textsuperscript{12}. Today many images of humanitarian organisations recall this attitude.

In recent years critical migration studies have come to analyze migration and flight not only in terms victims escaping unbearable situations – whereby leaving, flight, exodus is perceived only as “negative” or “negating power”.\textsuperscript{13} Rather flight and migration are seen also as “positive political practice”. An “autonomy of migration” is being stated.\textsuperscript{14} This perception is subversive within the frame of the public discourses on migration because it questions hegemonic categories and binary orders. The autonomy of the migrant and refugee is not absolute in the sense that he or she can completely escape the existing power relations. Yet the migrant or refugee is autonomous in the sense that he/she changes (not eliminates!) “governmental regimes of migration” and constitutes “new forms of cooperation and communication, new forms of life”.\textsuperscript{15}

This is being highlighted in an article by Martina Tazzioli on migration that is related to the Arab uprising. Tazzioli detects “strategies of migration [...] for enacting the freedom that Tunisians won through the revolution”. These strategies are not “a planned set of actions, but a practice that is undertaken for finding another space to live or for doing what ‘authorized’ mobile people ordinarily do namely, move round”.\textsuperscript{16} Yet the unauthorized migratory “practice of freedom” “‘disturb[s]’ and brakes the spatial and geopolitical stability of the Mediterranean”\textsuperscript{17}. These “freedom-migrants” enact new cartographies, counter-maps, that shake the European political order. As reaction to these disturbing transformations due to the spatial upheavals European governments try to “regulate” migration and to place themselves back into the ruling and ordering position.

\textsuperscript{12} Gayatri Chakrovarty Spivak, Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice, Wedge 7–8 (Winter -Spring 1985), 120–130.
\textsuperscript{15} Manuela Bojadzijev, Die windige Internationale. Rassismus und Kämpfe der Migration, Münster 2008, 147.
\textsuperscript{17} Tazzioli (2014), ix.
There is a political interest and fear behind the portrayal of migrants and refugees as victims and in undermining their agency respective agency and dignity of agents. The migrants’ and refugees’ agency is too threatening because, as Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet stated: „to flee is to produce the real, to create life, to find a weapon“. People who have fled, Deleuze and Parnet add, have not only learnt how to deal with difficult situations. They also often, in their new homes, do not just accept the conditions as they are.

1.5 Hybridization and Flight: Two dynamics of Postcolonial Theory
The topic of the agency of migrants links immediately to postcolonial constructions of colonial resistance. When we think of postcolonial attitudes towards resistance, we often think of Homi Bhabha’s and others’ theories on hybridity and intersticiality (Zwischenraum), bricolage and camouflage. These are inclusive strategies created by subalterns by which subalterns adapt to and at the same time subvert the situation of oppression. But for the topic of migration, it is equally important to consider, that postcolonial resistance can also mean to run away, to escape and flee, to exit the situation of suffering and subordination up to the point of using violence in order to be able to exit. This dynamic of refusal is more elusive in Postcolonial Theory – probably because the idea of fleeing and running away carries negative connotations. Yet the dynamic of exit has marked postcolonial theory right from its beginning. Frantz Fanon e.g. – though he did not opt for fleeing – nevertheless claimed the right of the oppressed to exit and end a situation of oppression, even by using counter-violence.

Leela Gandhi states that postcolonial theory presents to us an “ethic of departure” from suffering. This ethic is authorized – paradoxically – by the idea of the Enlightenment which by its call for freedom stressed the exit/escape from the authority of an “other”. Friedrich Nietzsche claimed, referring to Ambedkar’s Buddhist tradition that every suffering has an end, that exit from suffering is a movement of wellbeing.

1.6 Borders
A special focus of postcolonial critique and postcolonial theology has been on borders. This is caused primarily by the fact that drawing borders was a classical colonial strategy. Then and today this powerful strategy simultaneously produces inclusion and exclusion, even up to the point of its deadly consequences.

Borders denote geographical borders and hence e.g. the violent invasion of colonial powers and the colonial confining of borders, which is an act that up to recent times has caused various violent conflicts over borders. It is only since the 1990ies that some border conflicts stemming from colonial times have been brought to the International Court of Justice in Den Haag.

In postcolonial studies the interest in borders goes beyond geographical borders. Gloria Anzaldúa’s “Borderland/La Frontera” stimulated the reflection of the various interrelated borders: “The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and the spiritual borderlands [...]. In fact, the borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where the lower, middle and upper classes touch.”

Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova have developed Anzaldúa’s theory further and delineate a “critical border thinking” as alternative epistemology: “Border thinking brings to the foreground different kinds of theoretical actors and principles of knowledge that displace European modernity (which articulated the very concept of theory in the social sciences and the humanities) and empower those who have been epistemically disempowered by the theo- and ego-politics of knowledge.”

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22 Anzaldúa (1987), preface.
2. Postcolonial challenges for theology and theological discourses on migration and flight

Having looked at dynamics of migration and flight with “glasses” that are informed by postcolonial theory and critique, I will now scrutinize how church and theological practices respond to and impact dominating and subversive aspects of this discourse. Special attention will be drawn to Biblical interpretations. There is, I would argue, an interlinked set of ambivalent narratives and topics that have come to the fore in the recent decades and in the discussion on migration and flight. First, the call for hospitality, second, a new (self-)critical reflection on the power of borders, and thirdly, a new awareness of the crucial position migration holds in Biblical texts.

2.1 Rethinking hospitality

“Hospitality” is a term that originates in the “White” discourse and perpetuates the awareness of white supremacy, the Canadian theologian Thomas Reynolds states. In the context of Canada the hospitality discourse is often directed towards the indigenous people and to non-Canadian people, this means: those who originally come from Europe to settle in foreign land – which was conceptualized as empty land - have turned the perspective upside-down, and conceptualize themselves as hosts. In an attitude of benevolence not only the sovereignty of the indigenous people is eliminated. The “other” is also kept in distance. Hospitality as niceness and an accompanying rhetoric of tolerance prevents co-equalness and re-produces otherness. What is needed, Reynolds concludes, is a change in language, an ethic of mutuality and of sharing of power, and, last but not least, and openness to uncertainty: the other comes as surprise.

We find quite similar processes of thought within theology and churches worldwide. In Germany e.g. the EKD published a “recomendation” in the year 1996 with the title “Zur ökumenischen Zusammenarbeit mit Gemeinden fremder Sprache und Herkunft” (“Working together ecumenically with congregations of different languages and destinies”). The paper declares that hospitality is the core of what churches in Germany are called to show in the face of migrants. 15 years later, in 2014, the EKD brings published another recommendation on migration under the title „Gemeinsam

evangelisch! Erfahrungen, theologische Orientierungen und Perspektiven für die Arbeit mit Gemeinden anderer Sprache und Herkunft Ad-hoc-Kommission des Rates der EKD zur Zukunft der Arbeit mit Gemeinden anderer Sprache und Herkunft.“. This paper criticizes the focus on hospitality as hospitality tends to fix the other to the role of a guest who is expected to “go home” one day and who depends on the host.

There is an imbalance of power pervading the concept of hospitality as it can easily lead to what the postcolonial philosopher Kien Ngi Ha has called a “positive discrimination” that takes advantage of the other in order to fulfill the own needs and the “projection of political correctness”.25

More recent models try to avoid the power imbalance and focus on the agency of the migrant or refugee by stressing mutual hospitality.

One of the most ground-breaking recent approaches to hospitality comes from the Feminist and postcolonial theologian Letty Russel who coined the term “just hospitality”.26 Influenced by Musa Dube and other postcolonial Biblical scholars Letty Russels main concern is on postcolonial subjects and their strategies to be seen as coequal subjects. This strategy, Musa Dube states, “calls upon both the dominator and the dominated to examine the matrix of past and present imperialism and to map ways in which they can speak as equal subjects who meet to exchange words of wisdom and life”.27 Letty Russel thrives on this interconnectedness and links it to the topic of God’s hospitality:

“The postcolonial perspective is particularly helpful […] as a guide to the future, because this perspective recognizes that we are all in a postcolonial situation as both colonized and colonizing persons. We all bear the marks of colonial histories that have formed us. […] it means that we are in this together and need to sort out

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the power dynamics of our many and various positions with care if we are to truly practice God’s hospitality with one another.”

One of the characteristics in Russel’s theology of hospitality is that she demands the acknowledgement of difference: “Difference and hospitality are interlocked because it is the challenge of difference, strangeness, and ‘otherness’ that calls for the practice of hospitality”.

Preliminarily summarized we can say: the discourse on hospitality in theology and the church is highly ambivalent. It also shows parallels to the public discourse on migration and flight. What is at stake here are processes of othering and the demand to present “the other” as person with an own agency. Furthermore, discourses on migration and flight as well as on hospitality also relate to discourses on space and to the idea of what a decolonized postcolonial space would look like: maybe a space of „being at home,” where all seeking a home strive to co-inhabit a space, in God’s hospitality. Last but not least, Russel’s consideration on the acknowledgement of difference even in situations where the other is a guest and depends on hospitality reveals the same subversive attitude that recent critical migration research stated with regard to the autonomy of the migrant who transversally cuts across and changes the “governmental regimes of migration” and constitutes “new forms of cooperation and communication, new forms of life”.

Likewise, Russel’s model of God’s hospitality as just hospitality seems to give space to what in binary categorizations is missing: movements and processes that are not ordered by a sovereign power but found and compose something new.

2.2 Rethinking Borders
A term from public discussions on migration and flight that is frequently reflected in (postcolonial) theology is the term “borderer”. The leading questions with regard to boarders are: How – by means of which border-constructions – have theology and church practices contributed to social, racial, religious, geographical, gender-related and other boarders? And, what systematic-theological, biblical or spiritual resources support the overcoming of borderer thinking? Three examples:

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Cathryn Tanner calls for a self-critically unveiling of borders within theological thought or church practices, and claims: “God’s giving [of grace] indeed breaks all the usual boundaries of closed communities of concern”.\(^\text{30}\) The “theological vision of a universally inclusive community of mutual benefit”, should be “our moral compass.”\(^\text{31}\)

Daniel Groody, also from North-America, interprets borders in the context of migration as the various binary orders that need to be overcome: e.g., the divide between *inhuman and humane*, that dehumanizes migrants. In contrast to this divide the bible witnesses the overcoming of all dividing borders.\(^\text{32}\)


The three approaches demonstrate exemplarily the “postcolonial” challenge to scrutinize self-critically how theology and Christianity have contributed to the construction of borders and to the marginalization of “others”.

Yet, viewed from the presented point of view of postcolonial critique something very important is lacking here: the unauthorized agency and subjectivity of the other. Provocatively said: We see neatly ordered coherent theories that re-read Biblical texts and re-interpret Christian values in

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\(^{30}\) Cathryn Tanner, Economy of Grace, Minneapolis 2005, 73. Other theologies that take their leave at the border are e.g: Serene Jones, Feminist Theory and Christian Theology. Cartography of Grace. Guides to Theological Inquiry, Minneapolis 2000; Michael Nausner, Homeland as Borderland: Territory of Christian Subjectivity, in: Catherine Keller u.a. (Hg.), Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire, St. Louis 2004, 118–133.

\(^{31}\) Tanner (2005), 142.


the context of migration which try to do more justice to the excluded. But neither is the authority and legitimacy of these values themselves being questioned. Biblical text, for instance, are not – unlike in postcolonial hermeneutics – challenged for their inherent colonizing contents and effects. The epistemological and hermeneutical frame itself is not under scrutiny. Nor do the border theologies mentioned – except maybe Leticia A. Guardiola-Sáenz – dwell at the border, listen to the knowledge of those who live at the margins or of the migrants, or show any decentralizing move.

Theological reflections on the border could profit form de-colonializing theories and epistemologies like Mignolo’s border thinking approach that tries to avoid *othering* and Western superiority, and puts the unauthorized agency of the migrant into the center. Jörg Rieger presents such an alternative, following Walter D. Mignolo’s approach:

“Border thinking does not claim firm foundations [or] universal access to truth, or the cool objectivity of the social and natural sciences, but grows out of the perspective of those who experience the pressures of colonialism and imperialism in their own bodies [...] Border thinking – and its truth – emerge, ultimately, from the wounds of the colonial histories, memories, and experiences”.

The postcolonial discourse on migration challenges theology to move from the center to the borders and to decenter the center as the imagined place were truth and knowledge is generated. Border thinking means that truth is not to be controlled, manufactured, governed, fixed in thrilling theories about truth. In the words of Dipesh Chakrabarty: “the subaltern can teach us to give up control – which amounts to nothing less than a new way of knowing the truth: ‘To go to the subaltern in order to learn to be radically ›fragmentary‹ and ›episodic‹ is to move away from the monomania of the imagination that operates within the gesture that the knowing, judging,

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34 Dube, Musa W., Savior of the World but not of This World. Post-Colonial Reading of Spatial Construction in John, in: Sugirtharajah, R. S., The Postcolonial Bible, Sheffield 1998, 118–135. Postcolonial Biblical scholars like e.g. Musa Dube from Botswana stress that the same source, the Bible, we turn to in order to demonstrate that the Christian vision of the World is an inclusive and just vision, also contains passages that rather further colonial attitudes and that in fact have been used to legitimize the colonial endeavor.

Postcolonial critique brings into mind the agency of the migrant. Jorge E. Castillo Guerra from Panama/Netherland takes this idea further and claims that the experience and theology of migrants themselves should be the starting point for theological reflection. Migrants develop in their “theological” interpretation of their experiences a theology of hope and trust in the midst of despair, Guerra claims. They need to be seen as agents, as the ones, if any, in control of their theology and spirituality, and not as subjects to the theology of others, helped and controlled by theological experts.

2.3 The ambivalence of the “We are all migrants!”- rhetoric

There is one popular approach in (migration) theology and church practice today which seemingly follows the demand of postcolonial discourses on migration, not to other the migrant but to critically reflect on the “we” and “our” identity. This approach presupposes a perceptive turn: to see migration not as exception but as the normal case, as anthropological condition, and to define oneself as migrants.

Theologically this turn is underlined by referring to the bible and by stating: In the bible, migration is portrayed as dominant existential experience and this experience has been theologically very productive. Migration is not an exception but the normal case and constitutional for Christian identity: we all are migrants, pilgrims, and as such we are all vulnerable to geographical or identity related changes and insecurities.

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36 Rieger (2004), 37, with a quotation from Dipesh Chakrabarty, Radical Histories and Question of Enlightenment Rationalism, in: Vinayak Chaturverdi (Hg.), Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial, London 2000, 256–280, 275. Truth, in this postcolonial understanding, is therefore neither the one universal truth nor is it located (exclusively) in the Cartesian “cogito”. It is rather to be found at the margins, in the specific contexts of oppression, in bodily experiences of suffering. It is experienced through thoughts, deeds and sensations in the midst of the brokenness of lives and in search for liberation and reconciliation.

37 Jorge E. Castillo Guerra, From the Faith and Life of a Migrant to a Theology of Migration and Intercultural Convivencia, in: Judith Gruber/Sigrid Rettenbacher (Hg.), Migration as a Sign of the Times. Towards a Theology of Migration, Leiden 2015, 107-130.

38 I am not sure whether this turn in attitude started in the academic field or in solidarity movements, like the welcoming of refugees at the train stations in Munich, Rosenheim etc. in the summer of 2014 which heightened the sensitivity for the topic of migration.
These findings resonate with Castell’s assumption that we will in an “age of migration” as well as with sociological analyses that migration has become a metaphor for life in times of modernity. Life today is liquid, filled with uncertainty, with liquid fear and liquid love, as Zygmunt Baumann states.\(^\text{39}\)

Although this turn to define oneself as migrants is born out of the intention to stop the practice of othering, it bears ambivalence or even a trap. The turn to migration as universal anthropological condition becomes a problem when it overlooks the variety of forms of migration. Then, postcolonial critique claims, a colonial universalizing strategy is put into action again. This strategy of universalisation de-politicises migration again and disguises economic and political asymmetries and inequalities. In universalizing migration – which is often accompanied by universalizing vulnerability (as if there were no differences!) – the existing differences in terms of the rights attested to different groups of people tend to be overlooked or made invisible. In the worst case any form of resistance and exit-strategies, that the post-colonial critique values as important acts of the agency of migrants, then is made impossible in friendly disarmament.

With regard to Biblical texts on migration which are often used in order to support the theses that “we are all migrants” one needs to mention that these texts do not claim that migration has an end in itself. Rather, migration texts contain a claim for justice and demand that the migrant is treated in a just manner.

3. Un-concluding thoughts

Unconcludingly, I summarize: Postcolonial discourses on migration contain the request to listen to the migrant’s experience and the theological meaning that her or she bestows on this experience. Secondly, they call for an acknowledgement of his or her unauthorized agency. Thus, they thirdly lead the attention to places of resistance- and counter-discourses, places of

\(^{39}\) Zygmunt Baumann, Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty, 2007; liquid Fear, Malden 2006. This experience is an experience of freedom but also of loss. What is lost is the idea of a certain stable identity, the feeling of being at home in one certain culture, the experience of transforming identities and of hybridity. This can also lead to forms of self-ethnization, the encapsulation into one’s own, seemingly “authentic” culture, to cultural fundamentalism. See also: Kien Ngı Ha, Ethnizität, Differenz und Hybridität in der Migration: Eine postkoloniale Perspektive, in: Ethnisierung und Ökonomie Münster : Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2000, 3, 377–398.
cultural and religious entanglements, of fragmentary, episodic, transforming identities, on both “ends”: the side of migrants and the side of the self.

By this, fourthly, thinkers, theologians, and “agents” in the so-called “West” are requested, not to speak or think for or about the migrant as the other, nor to re-write the other and the Self a new, but to critically scrutinize the “we”.

This approach, fifthly, contains a call for justice and, sixth, a call for a critical and postcolonial rereading of Biblical texts on hospitality, boarders, and the migration. Last not least it demands critical reflection on dominant language and narratives.

It might be that Western academics are politically radical. But this does not mean that they are radical also theologically. Ecclesiologies and concepts of hospitality often tend to be conservative. Yet, the most important challenge for Western theologies is to learn from “the other” and to give up control and the pretension of a universalizing perspective.

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40 Synnøve Bendixsen/Trygve Wyller (Hg.), Contested Hospitalities in a Time of Migration. Religious and Secular Counterspaces in the Nordic Region
Mother tongue biblical hermeneutics in Ghana

JOHN D.K. EKEM

1. Preliminary remarks

Three approaches to the Interpretation of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures have attracted the attention of scholars in recent times:

- Readings Within The Text: Focusing on the Literary-Rhetorical Analysis of Texts in their current form.
- Readings In Front of The Text: Focusing on Contextual Issues from various Regions across the globe.

Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics (MTBH) in Ghana falls under the third category and can also be classified as an integral component of African Biblical Hermeneutics (For a detailed discussion of this third category, see Musa W Dube et al eds. Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations, 4-22).

MTBH can be defined as the process of interpreting the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, using thought categories from a community’s local language (Ekem, Early Scriptures of the Gold Coast, 10). As I have argued elsewhere, every language qualifies to be a people’s mother tongue, whether it cuts across local, national, continental/regional or global boundaries (Ekem, Interpretation of ‘Scripture’ in some New Testament Documents: Lessons for the Ghanaian Context, 59-60).

The exercise of Hermeneutics itself entails, among others, the scientific process of understanding & analyzing texts, be they written or oral, as well as the artistic process of re-packaging these texts for receptor audiences, taking cognizance of multiple contextual realities.

2. The Ghanaian context

Africa, particularly Northern Africa, has in ancient times, enjoyed a lion’s share of biblical interpretation techniques, thanks to the exploits of giants...
like Origen of Alexandria and Augustine of Hippo. If these employed the widespread colonial Greek and Latin languages as their media for ‘theologizing’ respectively, there were also attempts to communicate the message of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures in indigenous languages such as Coptic in Egypt and Ethiopic in ancient Ethiopia. With reference to the Gold Coast (Ghana), the first documented attempt to comprehensively translate as well as interpret aspects of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures to local communities came from Jacobus Elisa Joannes Capitein (1717-1747), an ex-slave who studied theology in Leiden, Holland and was ordained as the first black minister of the Dutch Reformed Church. Upon his own request, he was posted to Edina (Elmina) as chaplain of the castle where Dutch traders engaged in business including human trafficking. The horrors of the slave trade in Edina did have a profound impact on Capitein’s hermeneutics. For example, in translating ‘The Lord’s Prayer’ into the local Edina dialect, Capitein took cognizance of the social inequalities of his day to capture God’s ‘Fatherhood’ in universalist, all-inclusive terms as follows: *Jinejena Janadjia endi owassur* = ‘The Father of us all who is unquestionably in the Highest Exalted Sphere’. This translation resulted in some disagreement with his superiors in Amsterdam who wrote back on January 10, 1745 to query him as follows:

“We must also enquire about a small book consisting of the following translated items: the Lord’s Prayer, the Faith, and the Law. This came to our attention as printed in Leyden. On the one hand, we deeply value your attempts to make the [basic] documents of the truth widely available in the language which the Moors understand. But the Classis had certain reservations about which it wishes to enquire further. For example, could the translation not in places have kept closer to and be more in accord with the original text? For instance, you know that neither in the Greek text nor in any European translation known to me do the words ‘of all’ appear in the first phrase of the prayer, yet according to the translation of the Moorish version made by you, it would read: Father of us all, who is in heaven. One can find other similar instances, although it is possible that as yet there is no other appropriate translation, a possibility which we readily allow, being ignorant of the language.” (Kpobi, Mission in Chains, 250)

As I have argued in another publication, it was important to emphasize that God is indeed our Common Parent, regardless of ethnicity, skin color, social standing, gender or age. This theological fact may not have been clearly articulated in the translations available to Capitein and it was
essential to erase doubts that were possibly lingering in the minds of some Edina people as to whether they shared the same God with their oppressors. (Ekem, *Early translators and interpreters of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures on the Gold Coast*, 35)

Capitein’s translation of the Apostles’ Creed into Mfantse was also governed by similar concerns. This is seen, for example in his translation of the opening statement as *Mivia Jancompon Adja Pannin* = ‘I affirm God as Senior Family Elder’. Needless to say, such a concept can be viewed as a radical hermeneutical interrogation of the original text: *Pisteuō eis Theon Patera Pantokratora* = “I believe in God the Father Almighty” which evokes a sense of power and authority potentially inimical to those who experience oppression at the hands of power-drunk tyrants.

Mention can also be made of Christian Protten (1715-1769), a Moravian missionary born to a Gã [Gold Coast/Ghana] mother and a Danish father. He translated the phase *Pater hēmōn ho en tois ouranois* into Mfantse as *Jaeng agia, o eo wo Niame mu* = “Our Father who dwells in Niame[God]”. It is most probable that his translation inspired the Gã version produced by Augustus Hanson, an indigene from James Town, British Accra, who was posted to the Cape Coast Castle in Mfantseland to serve as chaplain in the 1840s. His translation, *Wa Tshe ni ia ŋungma mli* = “Our Father who dwells in Nyonmo [God]” was, similar to Protten’s aimed at expressing the concept of a God who transcends time and space. As I have argued elsewhere,

Protten and Hanson were not in any way subscribing to the notion of a *Deus remotus* or a *Deus otiosus* who shows no interest in the affairs of creation and has left the universe to endure its fate. On the contrary, they wrestled with the exact meaning of the Greek concept of *hoi ouranoi*, which, like its Hebraic counterpart *ha shamayim*, defies a simplistic translation and interpretation. For the locus of Deity stretches beyond our human imagination, embracing the remotest sphere outside the scope of time and space. (Ekem, *Indigenised Biblical-Theological Concepts as Paradigms for Nation Building: Some Gold Coast/Ghanaian Case Studies*, 9).

A final example would suffice for our eighteenth and nineteenth century case studies of antecedents of MTBH in the Gold Coast (Ghana). Samuel Quist, an indigenous Ewe theologian who lived in the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century, was apart from being
instrumental in the translation of the Ewe Bible, also known for his impressive commentary on Matthew’s Gospel in the Ewe language. A true masterpiece, this commentary reflected the scholarly meticulous approach to issues of MTBH by an African biblical scholar. There is a sense in which it can be argued that Quist was a creative bridge-builder between German and African scholarship, given his admirable ability to transpose the highest level of German biblical scholarship into meaningful Ewe thought patterns. In his *Bemerkungen zu Samuel Quists Erklärung des Matthäus-Evangeliums*, G. Däuble, a Bremen missionary of the early twentieth century, made the following thought-provoking remarks:


As a matter of fact, Quist was not simply a translator of German theological concepts, but also an interpreter, who like Capitein, Protten and Hanson, endeavored to communicate in meaningful ways to his compatriots.

### 3. Twentieth and twenty-first century efforts

Late twentieth century efforts by renowned Ghanaian scholars such as Kwesi Dickson, Gilbert Ansre, John Pobbe and Kwame Bediako deserve our attention. Kwesi Dickson (1929-2005), an emeritus professor of theology at the University of Ghana, Legon, former president of the All-Africa Conference of Churches and Conference of The Methodist Church Ghana, and a former president of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, published extensively in the fields of Old Testament Studies and Contextual Theologies in Africa. Two of his key publications are *Theology in Africa* (Lon-
don: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984) and Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), co-edited with Paul Ellingworth, a Scottish biblical scholar. In his writings, Dickson drew constant attention to the importance of vernacularization in theologizing within the African/Ghanaian context. Gilbert Ansre has been a pioneer Ghanaian linguist and Bible Translation Consultant within the United Bible Societies. He has supervised the translation of the Bible into numerous West African languages and is well-known for his groundbreaking work in Ewe phonology and semantics. John S Pobee, an Anglican priest and professor emeritus, University of Ghana, Legon, has written extensively in the fields of New Testament Studies, Missiology, Church History and Ecumenism, having also served the World Council of Churches in Geneva as its director, program for Ecumenical Theological Education. Among his key publications touching on issues of MTBH are Toward an African Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979) and Exploring Afro-Christology (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992). Kwame Bediako (1945-2008) was arguably the most prolific advocate for mother tongue theology in Africa. His writings took cognizance of the Ghanaian terrain and he showed a keen interest in mother tongue biblical hermeneutical issues, as seen for example, in his publications: Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985) and Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience (Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2000).

In the twenty-first century, Ben Quarshie, John Ekem, Philip Laryea and Jonathan Kuwormu-Adjottor can be described as the key proponents of MTBH in Ghana. Quarshie, current Rector of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture where mother tongue theologizing is taken seriously, has produced many significant publications in MTBH. One of his key publications titled ‘Doing Biblical Studies in the African Context – the Challenge of Mother-Tongue Scriptures (Journal of African Christian Thought, Volume 5, No. 1, June 2002) thoroughly discusses the enormous challenges faced by MTBH. But he offers a strong advocacy for the pursuit of the discipline as an authentic expression of original biblical scholarship in the Ghanaian context. Perhaps the most influential in terms of advocacy for MTBH in Ghana, Ekem doubles as the Translation Consultant of The Bible Society of Ghana and occupant of The Kwesi Dickson-Gilbert Ansre Distinguished Professorial Chair of Biblical Exegesis and Mother Tongue Hermeneutics, Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Accra, Ghana.

Frimpong Wiafe has also produced a Hebrew-Asante Twi Dictionary and a Hebrew-Ewe Dictionary respectively, both coming out in 2018. Mention should also be made of Philip Laryea, Dean of Accredited Studies at the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture who, though not specializing in Biblical Studies, has produced groundbreaking theological works in the Gâ language including *Yesu: Ḥwɔwɔ Nuytsɔ*= ‘Jesus, Lord of Ḥwɔwɔ’ which supply rich theological ingredients for mother tongue biblical interpretation in Gâ.

4. Concluding remarks

There is no doubt that MTBH has had a rich history in the Ghanaian context and is being pursued with all the passion that it deserves. As I have argued in some of my publications, the future of Biblical Studies in Africa is likely to be shaped, to a large extent by MTBH. The Centre for Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics, Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Accra,
Ghana, where I serve as Director, is in collaboration with The Bible Society of Ghana, Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation as well as other Bible Agencies, committed to the production of Bible Commentaries, Bible Dictionaries and other Study Aids in local Ghanaian and African languages. Hopefully, the diligent pursuit of these noble objectives should enable us to experience ‘Ancient Theological Alexandria’ afresh.

References
Neo-Colonialism and development: Biblical authority, religious traditions and some human rights issues in West-Africa

WERNER KAHL

1. Introduction

This paper is an attempt to answer the more specific question: What impact does the relation between biblical authority, African religious tradition and human rights within African Initiated Churches (AICs) have with regard to concrete questions like gender equality, LGBTI-rights and discrimination of people with HIV/AIDS and/or disabilities? Since Africa is a vast continent with a large diversity with respect to ethnic groups, belief systems and ecclesial traditions, I will restrict myself to only one sub-region in Africa, i.e. West-Africa, and here I will put a focus on Ghana due to my continuing personal experience and research in the country. Occasionally I will refer to phenomena and developments in other African regions.

The observations and reflections I share might hold true more or less also for some other regions in sub-Saharan Africa. However, even in the case of Ghana, one should be aware of the temptation of generalization with respect to cultural traditions and church values. Like in any African country, we encounter also in Ghana a variance of cultural and ecclesial traditions. It is an illusion to be able to ever get the whole picture since Ghanaian society at large as well as cultures and church life in particular have been subject to changes, at times due to global developments. Christianity in the sub-region has undergone a number of transformations, and it is ever evolving. The contemporary discourse on religious phenomena in Ghana has been shaped by Ghanaian colleagues, and their fieldwork has established as a fact that almost the whole range of Christianity in the

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1 This paper is based on a presentation given at a workshop on “African Independent and Pentecostal Approaches to Theology and Development” at Humboldt-University in Berlin in 2017. Cf. the collection of some of the proceedings: Philipp Öhlimann, Wilhelm Gräb and Marie-Luise (eds.), African Initiated Christianity and the Decolonisation of Development. Sustainable Development in Pentecostal and Independent Churches, London 2020.
sub-region has become more or less Pentecostalized within the past two decades. This is the outcome and manifestation of African Initiatives in Christianity many of which operate within global networks. Over the past three decades we have observed a certain degree of cross-fertilization between the historic mission churches and Pentecostal churches in Ghana. While the historical mission churches have become charismatic to various degrees, some of the larger Pentecostal churches have become institutionalized or are in the process of becoming so. In the course of this process, the latter have increasingly and overwhelmingly come to appreciate the value of theological education and of the social responsibility of the church. This has translated into the establishment of educational institutions and of relief programs within Pentecostal churches.

One essential mark of Pentecostal Christianity in the sub-region is the particular role the Bible plays in the life of the church in general and of the individual believer in particular. A high value is attributed to the Bible as the Holy Scripture of God. As such it can assume the function of an active


4 Cf. Sylvia Owusu-Ansah, Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches in Ghana, in: J.K. Asamoah-Gyadu (ed.), Christianity in Ghana: A Postcolonial History. Vol. 1: History and Mission, Legon-Accra 2018, 168-184, here: 182-183; Alfred Koduah, Classical Pentecostalism in Ghana, in: Asamoah-Gyadu (ed.), Christianity in Ghana, 136-167, here: 152. Also Trinity Theological Seminary, the prestigious theological institution in Ghana for the education of ministers in classical protestant mission churches, has witnessed some developments that are paradigmatic for the changing ecclesial landscape in the sub-region, cf. Asamoah-Gyadu, Sighs and Signs, 158: “(...) Pentecostal and charismatic pastors now apply in their numbers to study at Trinity. Not only have they come to appreciate the need for rigorous and critical academic training, but Trinity itself has responded positively to changing paradigms in Christianity by creating space for the ministries of healing, exorcism and deliverance in the curriculum.”

subject in the reading process. Believers might consult the Bible in order to experience the closeness of God and to gain orientation in life. In popular perspective, the Bible can be used as a recipe book for any kind of problem solution. The Bible is generally not regarded as a collection of faith documents from a distant past but as a portrayal of the world of the actual reader. In the reading process, the contemporary world is being conflated with the world of the Bible, and the world and the concerns of the reader are being read into the Bible. In this constellation, biblical passages might immediately become meaningful and relevant. Such intuitive readings can easily overwrite possible intended meaning-dimensions of a given biblical passage. The reader expectation might be informed by values of reference systems of traditional culture.

As an example for such a reading procedure which might result in an interpretation that is at variance with the intended meaning of a biblical passage, I would like to refer to an actualization of Mt 6:33 that is quite common not only in Ghana but in the whole of West-Africa. Significantly, this verse is often memorized in a version slightly different from the written English translations: “Seek you first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and everything (in the Bible translations we read here correctly “all these things” referring to items mentioned in the preceding verses, like food, drink, clothes, i.e. basic necessities of life) shall be added unto you.” In this instance the common reader expectation overrides the meaning dimension of the written text. This is not due to oral traditions of memorization or to illiteracy. Daniel Kolawole Olukoya, general overseer of Nigerian based Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, in his “Prayer and Deliverance Bible” comments on Mt 6:33: “The Bible terms riches as ‘all other things’ which should be added to the true seeker.” Exegetically and theologicaly, I would contest the legitimacy of this reading as an expression of an uncritical imposition of meaning onto the verse due to an arbitrary iso-

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6 Cf. the corresponding value attributed to the Bible as subject in the theology of Karl Barth, Die Kirchliche Dogmatik. Erster Band: Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes. Prolegomena zur Kirchlichen Dogmatik, 2. Halbband, Zollikon-Zürich 1937, 753: „(E)s ist die Schrift selbst tatsächlich ein lebendiges, ein handelndes Subjekt, das von der Kirche und in der Kirche nur als solches wirklich gehört und aufgenommen werden kann.“

7 Any reading of the Bible is, of course, in danger of using Biblical passages in such a manner. This also applies to academic readings.


10 Daniel Kolawole Olukoya, Prayer and Deliverance Bible (Lagos: Mountain of Fire And Miracles Ministries 2010), 22.
lation from its literary context in Mt 6 and its subsequent re-contextualization in a West-African frame-of-reference informed by a particular blend of traditional thinking with modern capitalist ideology.\textsuperscript{11} This reading of Mt 6:33 is, however, in this case not the interpretation of an unlearned man. Olukoya is not an educated theologian but it has been verified that he does hold a PhD in Molecular Genetics from the University of Reading, United Kingdom. The general understanding of the teachings of Jesus in the vein of prosperity preaching is shared in West-Africa by many Christians across educational divides, to various degrees, depending on membership in a historical mission church, in classical Pentecostal churches or in neo-Pentecostal churches (highest degree).

Presupposed is here is a frame of reference which reflects the most common mode of experiencing, interpreting, manipulating, and communicating life in the sub-region.\textsuperscript{12} According to this widespread conception of reality, life is a web of communal, physical and spiritual dimensions. People belong, and are subject to social groups and to the agency of spiritual beings. Everyone, everything and all events that are perceptible in the visible world can be thought of as embedded within a web of communal and spiritual affairs. With respect to the subject under discussion in this paper it should be noted that it is expected of an individual to serve responsibly the needs of his/her extended family. At the same time, his/her acts, if not in line with traditional values, have the potential to harm the extended family in incurring the wrath of spiritual beings that might affect physically not only the individual but also the larger group. I would like to emphasize that this manner of understanding reality is not irrational, as it might sound in a secularized North-Western perspective. In the described traditional West-African frame of reference which is still shared by the vast majority of the populations in the sub-region, people do distinguish between cause and effect, with the difference to the North-Western perceptions, that causes can be diagnosed as belonging to the spiritual sphere of reality. While in North-Western Europe such a manner of conceptualizing reality can be encountered in certain sub-cultures and pockets of soci-


ety including migrant churches, in West-Africa it is the standard model that pervades virtually, to different degrees, all strata of society.

Comparing North-Western and West-African concepts of understanding, shaping and communicating reality in vernaculars that represent very different language families, it makes good sense, on the basis of a common humanity, to establish distinct cultures which, of course, are bound to undergo transformations due to global exchange. Distinct cultural perspectives and life experiences, on the one hand, inform readings of the Bible. On the other hand, the realisation of the fact of distinct and at times contrary frames of reference makes us aware of the problematic of communicating, not to talk of the intention of transferring, values from one culture to another. At the same time, the intercontinental debate on issues like gender rights, homosexuality etc. as it is at times pushed by North-Western development agencies and churches, is even more complicated due to an imbalance of economic power and against the background of colonial history, de-colonization and neo-colonization. All these factors are at play in this debate as can be observed with respect to the subjects to be discussed in this paper.

2. The communication of North-Western values in West-Africa

Issues like gender equality, LGBTI-rights and discrimination of people with HIV/AIDS and/or disabilities have been high on the agenda of development agencies in North-Western Europe. In West-Africa in general and in the churches in particular, assessments of some of the above mentioned issues tend to be at variance with Western perspectives. A North-Western preoccupation with these issues, especially with respect to gender and sexuality, can appear in a West-African perspective as problematic: It is easily suspected to represent just another attempt of cultural domination by Europeans under the umbrella of universal human rights claims – as a neo-colonial program of disregard for traditional African values, in continuation with the colonial past including the efforts of mission churches in the 19th and 20th centuries.

As example might serve the controversy over homosexuality between Lutheran and Reformed partner-churches in Tanzania and Ghana on the one hand and Sweden, Germany and the USA on the other hand. Just as recently as August 2018, and without prior knowledge of the German partner churches of the Norddeutsche Mission, formerly Bremen Mission, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana and the Eglise Evangelique Presbyterienne du Togo have, at a joint synod, “in no uncertain terms rejected homosexuality, lesbianism and bi-sexual relations.” This agreement was supported by the “President of the All African Conference of Reformed Churches (ACRC), Rev. Dr. Uma Avo Owunta from Nigeria who was present at the function (and who) stated that, the African Reformed Church has unique values and must resist any western impositions such as same sex marriage. While commending both churches for practically depicting unity as one body of Christ irrespective of their nationalities, he implored the church to strive for independence from the Western world as a mark of maturity.” The issue of the controversial assessment of homosexuality between North-Western European and West-African partner churches is deeply intertwined with questions of power-relations and in particular so with respect to the power of interpretation and re-presentation. This also comes to expression in a statement of the National Director of Evangelism of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana, Rev. Emmanuel Antwi-Tumfuor, who is quoted as saying at the beginning of 2018: “The church will continue to be loud and clear in condemning such attempts aimed at promoting homosexuality in our society. No amount of aid promised by the developed world should make Ghana adopt that abominable act to save our beloved country from God’s anger.”

With respect to the assessment of homosexuality, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana has now taken a position similar to the one embraced by the larger Presbyterian Church of Ghana (connected to the Basel Mission) in 2011. It was argued that homosexuality was “un-natural”, “un-African”, “un-Biblical”, “Satanic” and potentially dangerous since its endorsement might draw the wrath of God upon the nation. It should be noted

16 Italics: W.K.
17 Ghanaian Graphic Online (Jan 5, 2018), italics: W.K.
18 Cf. the paper that I was invited to deliver at the WAATI-meeting in Kumasi in 2013: W. Kahl,
in this context, that in virtually all West-African nations homosexuality is criminalised. As indicated above, presupposed here is an epistemic system of conceptualizing the world that is completely different from the one prevalent in contemporary North-Western Europe.

In a communalistic and spiritualistic environment, conducting one’s life has the potential to affect one’s extended family or even community, and there is a strong expectation that married couples procreate. In this context, homosexuality is widely held as an abomination caused by adverse spirits. As such, homosexuality might threaten the community both spiritually and materially.\textsuperscript{19} Therefore, in this perspective, North-Western European values can be regarded in the sub-region as potentially dangerous for the welfare of the whole society, in a spiritual sense. Here, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 19 is drawn upon as biblical proof-text. The story is commonly understood in the following way: The homosexuality of the people incur God’s wrath who then eradicates the whole population.

In this case the Bible becomes a powerful ally of supposedly “African” cultural values, against North-Western European attempts at superimposing values and life-styles that seem to be clearly at variance with the unified – or not so unified\textsuperscript{20} – witness of the Bible.

Recent field work has brought to light that such an assessment of homosexuality is shared in Ghana generally by large portions of the population irrespective of age. Corresponding research has come to the following conclusion: “Data showed that young people recognise existing traditional gender norms as well as changing and flexible gender roles in Ghanaian society. Data from the field also revealed largely negative attitudes to homosexuality, from both males and females (sic!) students and non-students. Education was a minor factor in changing perceptions about homosexuality.”\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{itemize}
\item The Gospel, the Bible, the churches and homosexuality. Hermeneutical reflections, in: Kahl, Ecumenical case studies, 6-13, and Joseph W. Acheampong, Homosexuality. The position of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in context, in: Kahl, Ecumenical case studies, 29-35.
\item Cf. the contributions by scholars from various parts of the world, in: Kahl, Ecumenical case studies.
\item Naa Motso Allotey, Perceptions of Youth towards Homosexuality in Ghana. Masterthesis, Faculty of Psychology, University of Bergen 2015, 1.
\end{itemize}
As for the issue of LGBTI-rights we encounter in sub-Saharan Africa a strong opposition to values embraced especially among the more educated strata of North-Western European societies.

With respect to the perception of people infected of HIV/AIDS, it seems that attitudes have undergone some changes in the past three decades, moving from initial stigmatization, rejection and fear into the direction of acceptance, sympathy and care, both in the wider public and in the churches, including Pentecostal churches. This transformation has been facilitated by awareness campaigns of the government and NGOs and increasingly by the churches.\(^{22}\) In the churches, the biblical motif of divine compassion could be actualized in this regard. However, any sickness and disability can still be attributed to the agency of evil spirits, witches or to ancestral curses. And in this respect, the Bible and esp. the New Testament writings seem to reinforce traditional sickness diagnosis. Visiting prayer camps in Ghana, one can encounter ill and disabled people entrusted to so-called powerful men of God who try to drive out evil spirits or to break ancestral curses.

Regarding the question of gender equality, we do witness generally in churches of any denomination attempts at a cementation of classical Western gender roles that had been introduced by European and American missionaries in the 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) centuries. That women should be subordinate to men in general and should be obedient to their husbands in particular can be heard regularly in wedding services of any denomination, with particular reference to biblical passages such as 1Tim 2:8-15.\(^{23}\) But also in this respect, attitudes are beginning to change esp. with young couples that have travelled abroad, who are connected globally via social media, and who after all belong to a matrilineal ethnic group like the Akan. In fact, in Ghana women have recently been pushing for leadership roles in the polit-


ical arena, in academia and in the churches.\textsuperscript{24} Considering the new generation of up-coming female scholars for example at the Department for the Study of Religions at Legon University in Accra, I project that more women will be seen in leadership positions not only in academia but also in the churches in future, and some Pentecostal churches might review their position of excluding women from their pulpit.\textsuperscript{25} This, however, can only become a reality as a result of internal initiatives and not of external influences that even might prove counter-productive for the cause. Accepting leadership roles of women in AICs is an increasing phenomenon in Ghana and other West-African countries.

3. \textbf{Summary}

At issue here is the question of biblical hermeneutics and contextual theology. Possible or impossible, or rather plausible and implausible meanings of biblical passages are actualized not only in particular cultures with their frames of reference and conventions. In today’s world, interpretations of the Bible and the world are also being negotiated in global dimensions. As post-colonial Biblical criticism has made us aware, this involves also the history of a particular and long lasting power-play with the North-Western European world trying to dominate life and discourses in Africa, especially when it comes to church-life and the interpretation of the Bible.\textsuperscript{26}

Due to the global exchange of goods, the worldwide communication of values and movements of migration, conventions in both church and society are also subject to change in West-Africa.\textsuperscript{27} It is up to the people in Ghana to come to terms with and to shape developments at their own pace. International exchange of ideas might help facilitate a widening of horizons that allows for a critical exploration of a broader range of possible

\textsuperscript{24} Cf. Dorothy Bea Akoto, Gender and Culture in the Church and in Theological Education: Woundedness and the Need for Healing, in: Trinity Journal of Church and Theology 19/2 (2017), 7-29.


\textsuperscript{27} With respect to a new appreciation of traditional culture by Pentecostal leaders, cf. E. Kumi-Amoah, Pentecostalism, Chieftaincy and Festivals in Ghana: Engagement between Pentecostals and the Fellowship of Christian Chiefs and Queens (FCCQ) as a shift in Mission Strategy (PhD dissertation, Frankfurt a.M. 2018), to be published in the series Studien zu Interkultureller Theologie an der Missionsakademie (SITMA), Hamburg 2019.
strategies to engage, balance and possibly actualize North-Western Western initiatives as regards issues of human rights, in local contexts. Such encounters might also enable representatives of Western development agencies to come to a more appropriate and appreciative understanding of complex matters in other societies as represented by cultural insiders and local agents of change.

The fact that conventions and values of societies in the global South are being actively challenged by North-Western European development agencies and churches, and not visa-versa, deserves critical reflection.
The challenge and contribution of *postcolonial* theory to Biblical Hermeneutics in Oceania/Samoa

MOSESE MA’ILO

Robert Young begins with the following thought provoking questions in his Oxford publications on Postcolonialism.¹

Do you feel that your own people and country are somehow always positioned outside the mainstream? Have you ever felt that the moment you said the word ‘I’, that ‘I’ was someone else, not you? That in some obscure way, you were not the subject of your own sentence?

Do you feel that whenever you speak, you have already in some sense been spoken for? Or that when you hear others speaking, that you are only ever going to be the object of their speech?

Do you sense that those speaking (on your behalf) would never think of trying to find out how things seem to you, from where you are? That you live in a world of others, a world that exists for others?

On purpose, I select this opening to settle our knowledge of postcolonial theory on a more engaging platform. Our home (Samoa/Oceania) has been (quasi) colonized and we are challenged to look from the other side of the picture, experiencing how differently things look when you live in American Samoa, Apia or New Caledonia rather than New York, Paris, Berlin or London, and understanding why. Postcolonial theory assumes that such politics of ‘difference’ is a corollary of ‘imperialism,’ the historical process which fixed relationships of domination and subordination; relationships that delineates our current world.

1. Postcolonial Theory

‘How can we find a way to talk about this; to address the reality and severity of imperialism and colonialism?’ The literature on postcolonial the-

ory is huge, and a detailed analysis is impractical in this paper. Nevertheless, a brief overview shows that the success of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*\(^2\) sensitized a new generation of critics involved in a major departure from the humanist approaches.\(^3\) Edward Said explored the extent to which colonialism fabricated a way of seeing the world, an order of things that was learned to be true and proper. Based on the political philosophies of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault, Said examines how the Western knowledge about the ‘other’ was produced in a variety of canonical English literature. Such knowledge, which was taken as scientific truths, was used to legitimize the Western colonial project. Power and domination was armored by the production of knowledge about the exotic African, Oceania, Asian, etc., who were always portrayed in degenerating images.

In the 1980s, commonwealth literary critics produced three forms of textual analysis. The first group, following Said, began to re-read canonical literature to detect any form of perpetual authorization or questioning of the colonial themes, ideas and assumptions.\(^4\) A second group of critics, influenced by the post-structuralist thoughts of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan began to scrutinize colonial representations of the colonized subjects in other texts like travel writings, colonial administrative documents, painting, art, and of course missionary writings; not just canonical literature. While the first group focused on how the West produced knowledge about the other, the second group of critics set out to ask, “... was it possible to read these texts against the grain and discover in them moments when the colonized subject resisted being represented with recourse to colonial values?”\(^5\)

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3 This cannot disregard the original contribution of pioneers like Frantz Fanon, who in the 1950s produced *Black skin, white masks*, a book that explains the consequences of identity formation for the colonized subject who is forced into the internalization of the self as an other. In the 1960s, he also published *The wretched of the earth* a book that exposed the mechanics of colonialism and its effect on those it enslaved. But in terms of turning such ideas into theory, Said’s work laid the basic foundations for literary critics.

4 For example of these canonical literature are the famous and popular English novels *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad (1899), *Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen (1814), *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte (1847) and many others.

5 John McLeod 2000, 24
Two leading and most controversial critics, Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri C. Spivak pursued this trend in two different ways. Bhabha argues that the ambivalence of the colonized subject became a direct threat to the authority of the colonizers through the effects of mimicry. Spivak explored the problem of whether or not it was possible to recover the voices of those who had been made subjects of colonial representations, particularly women, and read them as potentially disruptive and subversive. Since the 1980s, Said, Bhabha and Spivak have opened a variety of theoretical concerns central to postcolonialism.

But an important book appeared in 1989 titled *The Empire writes back.*

This is the third group of critics, who noted (in study of commonwealth literature) the importance of how writers from countries with a history of colonialism have expressed their own sense of identity. How? By using untranslatable words, signs and structures derived from ‘other’ languages, and incorporating many different creolized versions of English into their texts instead of following the standardized “English” syntax. Their local concerns were primary to their meanings; not of minor value.

At the risk of oversimplification, I wish to end this synopsis on postcolonial theory at this point by briefing, what postcolonial theory offers.

*Postcolonial theory offers a way to talk about*

The reality of inequality in the world today, which “. . . falls across the broad division between people of the west and those of the non-west.” Such division was a construction of European imperialism, when nine-tenths of the entire land surface of the globe was controlled by European or European-derived powers.

*Postcolonial theory offers a way to talk about*

The reality that colonization was legitimized by representing non-Western people as the savage, childlike, or feminine, inept and incompetent to think for and looking after themselves. They therefore required the paternal rule of the west for their own good. Such ethnological/anthropological
representations were actually based on the concept of ‘race.’\textsuperscript{9} White culture was regarded as superior with the best ideas for legitimate government, religion (theology), science, and economics, etc.

\textit{Postcolonial theory offers a way to talk about}

The reality that colonization was also about “getting colonized people to accept their inferior ranking in the colonial order of things – a process we can call ‘colonizing the mind’.”\textsuperscript{10} It successfully operated by the internalization of Western values and assumptions as regards the way they perceive the world.\textsuperscript{11} One scholar further states, “If the internalization of colonial sets of values was to a degree . . . an effective way of disempowering people, it was also the source of trauma for colonized peoples who were taught to look negatively upon their people, their culture, and themselves.”\textsuperscript{12}

\textit{Postcolonial theory offers a way to talk about}

The reality that decolonization is not just about handing back of land to the dispossessed people and the signing of declarations of independence. “It is also a process of overturning the dominant ways of seeing the world, and representing reality in ways which do not replicate colonialist values.”\textsuperscript{13} It is about ‘decolonizing the mind,’ as the African writer Ngugi famously stated.

\textit{Postcolonial theory offers a way to talk about}

Recognizing that the force of continuing colonization is now in the form of globalization, ‘postcolonialism’ is thus not the same as ‘after’ colonization. The term moves beyond a strict marking of historical moments or periods. It recognizes both historical \textit{continuity} and \textit{change}. Likewise it acknowledges that “… the material realities and modes of representations common to colonialism are still very much with us today, even if the political map of the world has changed through decolonization.”\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{9} This is evident in the experiences of people like Frantz Fanon, \textit{Black Skins, White Masks}, trans. Charles Lam, Markmann: Pluto, 1952
\item \textsuperscript{10} Ngugi wa Thiongo, cited in John McLeod, \textit{Beginning Postcolonialism}, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000, 18
\item \textsuperscript{11} John McLeod 2000, 18
\item \textsuperscript{12} John McLeod 2000, 19
\item \textsuperscript{13} John McLeod 2000, 22
\item \textsuperscript{14} John McLeod 2000, 33
\end{itemize}
It is imperative to acknowledge that colonial relationships still exist in the world as well as in once colonized areas. Its values are silently or apparently alive in the treatment of women, children, poor, less privileged and the marginalized even within Oceania, our cultural, political, and ecclesiastical backyards. The literature offers many definitions and terminology clarifications. Postcolonial in its historical sense is not a chronological marker to certain “periods,” or “eras.” It is used here as a referential marker for a range of critical perspectives on the social, cultural, and political conditions after the historical demise of empire and the process of decolonization.

2. Postcolonial Biblical Hermeneutics

Postcolonial biblical scholars concentrate on three modes of reading. They are all based on relating postcolonial principles of reading with the Bible as an ancient text. How? By relating postcolonial studies to modern readings either by way of Europe or America, and, identifying those who re-read biblical narratives in the light of postcolonial concerns. Some of these concerns are plurality, hybridity, multi-culturalism, nationalism, diaspora, refugees, and asylum seeking. Let me elaborate more on these three modes of reading.

2.1 Situating imperialism and colonialism at the centre of the Bible

This mode of reading treats the Bible as a literary product of various colonial contexts like the Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, Greece and Roman Empires. Fernando Segovia, one of the pioneers of postcolonial biblical studies argues, “...the shadow of empire in the production of ancient texts (Bible) is to be highlighted.” The purpose is to obtain the always forgotten views of the marginal and how they look at a world that was dominated by the reality of empire. How does the centre regard and treat the margins in the light of its own view of the world? How is history constructed by both sides? How is the margin represented in the centre?

15 See Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, 1989; Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, Key concepts in postcolonial studies Routledge, 1998; Ania Loomba, Colonialism/Postcolonialism Routledge, 1998
16 R. S. Sugirtharajah 2006, 64-65
18 R. S. Sugirtharajah 2006, 67
19 Fernando F. Segovia 2004, 126
With the reality of empire in the biblical texts, stories and narratives are re-read with an eye on power relations, hegemonic intentions, and imperial inclinations that silence the voices and worldviews of those at the margin of society. The task of postcolonial reading is to surface critical issues that are sidelined, as well as questions of power, ideology, and culture. For such magnitude, see especially the contributions by Musa Dube’s re-reading of John;¹ Warren Carter’s re-reading of Matthew in the colonial context of the Roman Empire;² and Itumeleng Mosala’s re-reading of the Book of Esther in the colonial context of the Persian Empire.

2.2 Situating imperialism and colonialism at the centre of Western reading

The second mode of reading focuses on the exposure of colonial intents behind Western scholarship and interpretations of the biblical texts. Segovia points out that in biblical criticism, the academic study of the Bible and its formation in the nineteenth century “. . . parallels the second major wave of the missionary movement as well as the transition period to the second, high phase of Western imperialism and colonialism.”³ The point is, questions of power, ideology, and culture are not excluded in the production of Western readings and interpretations of the Bible. This phase includes the missionary period that affected Oceania the most.

Some of the following names are not postcolonial practitioners in their respective fields of study, but their insights reflect this magnitude of the postcolonial enterprise. Havlor Moxnes exposes how colonialism, national identity, ethnicity, and race have influenced scholarly constructions of Galilee in nineteenth century biblical scholarship in Europe.⁴ Shawn Kelly exposes how the category of ‘race’ was injected into the historical streams of Euro-American biblical scholarship.⁵ Michael Prior contends that the task of interpretation involves “. . . the imperial past of European expan-

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³ Fernando F. Segovia 2004, 128
⁵ Shawn Kelly, Racializing Jesus: Race, ideology, and the formation of modern biblical scholarship. London: Routledge, 2002
sion into Latin America, South Africa and Palestine, and showing how the fabricated ethnocentric, xenophobic and militaristic character of the Bible provided the legitimacy and inspiration for such a barbaric enterprise.”

For postcolonial critics, Western interpretations and constructions of biblical history and theology are very much influenced by an attitude of western supremacy.

2.3 Readings in the light of postcolonial concerns

The truth is, in spite of the omnipresent character of imperialism and colonialism; it was never imposed and received in an impression of absolute passivity. At times, there were resistant readings from the part of the politically, culturally, and religiously subordinated margins. It is therefore appropriate to distinguish between two groups of readers; people who readily accept and associate with the long tradition of Western dominant readings, and those from the colonies and once colonized areas who rail against such imperialist interpretations. These readers (mostly from the third world) resisted dominant readings by placing the Bible in the context and reality of their life situations. The analysis of the readers’ contexts and their reactions are as significant as the worldview(s) of the Bible writers.

Essays and articles in anthologies like John and postcolonialism edited by Musa Dube and Jeffrey Staley, thematic Semeia issues like Semeia 75 (1996) edited by Laura Donaldson and Semeia 88 (2001) edited by Roland Boer, are very good examples of the scope and purpose of postcolonial biblical interpretation. Two broad strategies dominate this magnitude of postcolonial hermeneutics within biblical studies; a search for the marginalized or suppressed voices in, behind and below the text, and the formulation of subversive readings, or a deliberate inversion of the traditional reading of the biblical texts. The purpose is to overcome the remoteness and strangeness of the biblical texts by trying to make links across the cultural divides. How? By illuminating biblical narratives and making sense of imported foreign concepts, spatially and temporally through indigenous resources, texts, and concepts.

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8 R. S. Sugirtharajah, “Thinking about vernacular hermeneutics sitting in a metropolitan study,”
2.4. Conclusion
Several conclusions can be drawn from the above analysis. First, bibli-cal narratives were conditioned by cultures of imperialism in the Ancient Near East. In that respect, the canonical authority of the Bible should no longer be treated as absolute, but as contextual and dialogical. Our concern should not be of whether the Bible is literally binding, but how best to bring its life-giving message to God’s people in their own time and place.

Secondly, the universalizing Western methodologies and scholarship that govern their hermeneutical conclusions were conditioned by Western cultures and present a limited worldview. Biblical interpreters are required to be familiar with the history of Western imperialism and its influence on biblical hermeneutics. The existence of an absolute method of reading is to be treated as a revitalization of colonial values. Triumphalistic universal interpretations should be challenged. Other ways of reading and interpretation are to be appreciated as part of the biblical hermeneu-tical dialogue.

Thirdly, biblical and theological hermeneutics can be a resistant and counter-culture discipline, paying special attention to hidden and neglected voices in biblical narratives and modern society. Biblical hermeneutics must be resistant in terms of neglecting those dominant readings and interpretations which foster inequality and injustice. At the same time, biblical hermeneutics has to be emancipative by siding with the suppressed voices of society.

Do we (Oceania/Samoa) need postcolonial theory? From the above conclusions, it seems adequate to say YES.

3. Ability and value of postcolonial theory
In spite of its limitations, I assume that postcolonial theory lends its shoul-der to Oceania theological hermeneutics in two dimensions. First, its ability to articulate the aspirations of subjugated people with reference to their sense(s) of identity and self-determination. It offers a way to elo-

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9 Lee Boyung, “When the text is the problem: a postcolonial approach to biblical pedagogy,” *Religious education*, Winter (2007); 4-5

97 in *Vernacular hermeneutics*, Ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999; 97
quently and coherently express the reality of who we are and how we view the world. I have in mind a new understanding of Oceania identity; one that realizes the importance of change, of *hybridity*, where identity is understood as hyphenated, split, multiple and multiplying. One scholar put it in more concrete words and contends that our identity becomes “. . . a complex web of cultural negotiation and interaction forged by imaginatively redeploying the local and the imported elements.” This understanding disqualifies any essentialist notion of “identity” based on consciousness and genetic “origin.”

Secondly, the value of postcolonial theory is invested in its capacity to pose a resistant and emancipative encounter against dominant readings and interpretations, without ever neglecting aspects of gender, sexuality and ethnicity in the process. This is one of the most significant contributions of postcolonial theory to our purpose. A hermeneutic of both resistance and emancipation aims at dislodging Western constructions of knowledge about us, by defying the standard binary models of categorization. On the same level, a hermeneutic of emancipation addresses our diversity and diverse issues we face in the region. It serves our interests in reclaiming our histories and memories, not for the sake of triumphalism, but our presence in this Ocean as flesh and blood readers.

4. **Oceania and ‘decolonization’**

Postcolonial reading emerges as a fitting marker for a variety of critical perspectives on the process of decolonization. Oceania is a place with a history of colonization and obviously, some island nations are still traumatized by colonization, and maybe some of us in this gathering are descendants of its victims. In such scenario, decolonization is imperative. We affirm that colonization was also about getting natives to accept their lower ranking in the colonial order of things—a process we can call ‘colonizing the mind.’ It functioned through the internalization of Western values and assumptions as regards the way they perceive and represent the world. The internalization of such colonial sets of values was effectively disempowering people.\(^\text{11}\)

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11 John McLeod 2000, 19
Biblical and theological hermeneutics in Oceania must involve in a process of decolonizing the mind. This is about emancipating our perspectives when reading the Bible, which are still imprisoned in the social, cultural, and religious impacts of colonial structures. Postcolonial hermeneutics is more than ideology criticism. It specifically addresses the silencing of the ‘other’ through colonial strategies, like posing the colonized as the contrary of the colonizer, and emptying the colonized world of meanings. Decolonizing the mind as the re-engagement of Oceania world of meanings can be one of the focuses of Oceania theological hermeneutics, a process towards the empowerment of the people of Oceania.

4.1 Which ‘Bible’ for Oceania theological hermeneutics?
I would like to end this presentation with a challenge in terms of resources; born out of my personal journey in biblical criticism and as an Oceania faifeau. Postcolonial reading changed my attitude towards biblical studies, towards its traditional principles which are so precious to any biblical student. The greatest challenge that this mode of reading pressed on me was the place and value of the Bible in my own tongue, the Bible that my mom taught me to respect and worship as a god, to love it, to memorize its verses, to perform its stories, to recite and sing its lines day and night. Does it have a place in biblical and theological scholarship?

The point is, ‘How could an Oceania hermeneutics be ‘Oceania’ when we still rely on the use of foreign Bibles in Greek, Hebrew, Latin or English languages as the basic texts that direct our readings and interpretations?’ ‘Isn’t there any value or inspiration in the Word of God in our own tongue to be cherished as the texts for Oceania biblical reflections?’ I argue for a serious reconsideration of Oceania Bibles not simply as translations, as copies or colonies of some Ur-texts, but as textual resources at our disposal. Oceania languages and conceptual framework of thinking should be the starting point of a biblical and theological hermeneutics that is truly Oceanic. I believe, the first hurdle to traverse is the change of attitude towards our Bibles. To accomplish that, it is vital to re-read the history of their production and translation, focusing an eye on how they be used sensibly and judiciously as valuable tools for Oceania theological hermeneutics.

4.2 Oceania Bibles as texts for biblical hermeneutics

Oceania biblical hermeneutics has to start by acknowledging which Bible ‘telling’ we are reading from. It is not about absolutizing a native Bible as mark of identity. It is to take its *hybridity* as the starting point of reading. Our cultural variables are to be re-signified as ‘referents,’ not as the ‘starting point’ of interpretation. Sugirtharajah cautiously wrote,

> 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. In our enthusiasm to recover the native, we may put ourselves in the double predicament of finding redeeming values both in the indigene and in the text... By eulogizing the ascendancy of the native and revalorizing the text, we may end up by fixing, absolutizing and immobilizing both.13

Oceania theological hermeneutics re-signifies our presence, our voices, and our memories in biblical and theological dialogue. It would be naïve if our purpose is to eulogize our cultural values. Our purpose is to ‘uncover’ our presence as *hybrid* human beings in terms of identity, rather than recovering our past as cultural purity. There is difference between recovering the native’s culture and recovering the native as a *hybridized* cultural human being. The former is perhaps plausible if any pure indigenous culture still exists. But the latter is more close to the present concrete reality, because it is about re-signifying our indigenous experiences as universal human beings rather than falling into the temptation of being culturally exclusive.

Taking the native Bible seriously should *not* be based on its language as mark of identity, but because of its hybrid language and cultural diversity. For instance, in the Samoan Bible, theological hermeneutics begins with biblical terms in our own languages, auauna, Alii, tausamaaga, papatiso, or ola faavavau, then the interpreter explores the richness of the Samoan language and its conceptual framework of thinking. The next step should be a comparative analysis to other Oceania languages and cultural variables. After that, then we move on to the original biblical languages and their cultural values, as well as the available options offer by other cultural locations worldwide. But starting with our own Bible languages builds our

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confidence to read, *talanoa*, and formulate our theological expositions in a familiar household tongue. At the same time, we also recognize that our hermeneutics is just part of a global biblical and theological dialogue, where nothing is lost but also gained in translation.

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Samoan Bible
“The common” and the notion of “belonging” in Ephesians 2:11-22: Naga women in conversation with biblical reality

ZAKALI SHOHE

1. Introduction

The interpretation of the biblical text with historical critical method or traditional exegesis continues to be widely used method in biblical scholarship. However, employing traditional exegesis alone can seem insufficient today especially in the light of the modern tools and methods in biblical interpretation, which helps in our understanding of a multifaceted worldview and hybridity. This essay presupposes that applying and developing modern methods and frameworks to the traditional exegesis can help in a broader understanding of a biblical text and provide helpful outcomes. Therefore, this essay attempts to employ postcolonial vocabularies and frameworks to the study of Ephesians 2:11-22 in order to identify the common in relation to the notion of belonging. Postcolonial scholars in Pauline studies have been able to capture the attention of the readers to questions concerning race and ethnicity and highlight the effects of colonizing tendencies in the biblical texts.¹

In a diverse cultural, traditional, people groups both dominant and marginalised and perspectives, any collaboration is possible by acknowledging, respecting and accepting the “other.” A postcolonial reading requires the collaboration between the dominant and the marginalised groups. Without respecting and accepting the “other” a reading of a biblical text cannot be liberating, but it will only give rise to another form of colonialism. A reading that accepts and provides “space” to the “other” result in affirming the diverse identities and appreciating the differences. Such reading also applies to Ephesians 2:11-22. In Ephesians 2 there is a call for accepting

and acknowledging the “other.” 2 A call for a community, that affirms the cultural and ethnic diversities, thus, creating “space” for belongingness.

The notion of belonging can be expressed by asking the questions of belonging to “what,” “whom” and “where.” In asking these questions we find the relation among “belonging,” “common” and “space.” Floya Anthias asserts that belonging can be applied to “formal rights of citizenship” or it can be applied to less formal but powerful sectors like “families or social networks.” In the notion of belonging, boundary crossing is important and is related to something outside the “self,” hence it is “located.” 3 Defining the “other” or “oneself” based on the standpoint of a group is identity-related and can have negative impact on ethnic, socio-cultural and religious minorities and women. This is because identity-related definitions decide which identities are included and excluded within a majority-defined standard. 4 Identifying the “common”, whether status, way of life or struggles, leads to inclusion or exclusion of the “other.” This essay will identify the “common” in Ephesians 2:11-22 in relation to the notion of belonging, in the hope of bringing the experience of Naga women in Nagaland into conversation with biblical reality.

2. The Context: Naga Women in Nagaland

There are assumptions that Naga women in Nagaland have equal status and position and fit into the dominant group alongside their male counterparts, 5 but in reality, the society is patriarchal with a clear hierarchy of men above women. 6

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2 The notion of Acceptance in Paul is discussed extensively in my work, Acceptance Motif in Paul: Revisiting Romans 15:7-13 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2017).
The traditional Naga society defines men as the backbone of the society and the breadwinner in the family. This understanding did not change even with the coming of Christianity. In fact, Christianity has also been interpreted in favour of the hierarchy of men over women. Women's role in the traditional Naga society was restricted to child bearing and rearing, looking after the comforts of their husbands and managing their household. Women were also excluded from social events as her presence was considered a bad omen. With regards to property ownership, women were not legitimate heirs. In the traditional Naga customary law, in the absence of the male child, the nearest male member of the father’s family inherited the family properties. Politics was considered men's game, a mindset ingrained in both men and women even in the present time; women are not considered capable candidates in the Legislative assembly, and their only role in politics is to campaign for her husband. So also, women were never a part of the decision-making village council, although there is some flexibility in a few councils in recent years. Thus, women in the traditional Naga society basically play their role in the background in almost all spheres of life, are dependent on men, a woman basically play their role in the background in almost all spheres of life, are dependent on men, and are considered inferior to men.7

3. Naga Women, Tradition, Bible and Interpretations

Despite the exclusion of women in the Naga traditional practices and cultures especially in the political arena and the decision-making bodies, women have raised their voices from diverse perspectives and platforms. For instance, the publication of *Side by Side: Naga Women Doing Theology in Search of Justice and Partnership* in 2004, a contribution by Naga Women Theological Forum, was an important contribution on the questions of the identity and status of Naga women. It covered wide areas from identifying the place and status of women in the traditional Naga society, her rights in specific Naga traditional practices like the customary laws, the recovery of women’s contribution in the Naga history, to the role of women in Christian ministry and the re-reading of the Bible from a perspective that is transforming for women.

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For the Nagas in Nagaland, their tradition and faith define their being and identity. A roughly 90% majority of the Nagas in Nagaland are Christians, and so the Bible holds an important place in the lives of Naga women. As such, women in the Naga society saw the need to develop feminist readings of Scripture and tradition. In attempts to develop such readings, importance was given to the contributions of women in traditional Naga society, the experiences of women, and the challenges that Naga women encounter in a male-dominated and male-dictated society. On the role of the Bible in the lives of Naga women in their struggle for empowerment, V. Anshely Sumi also observes that a reading of the Bible is articulated out of women’s “experiences and questions.” She identifies three things that need to be taken into consideration in Naga women's interpretation: tribal tradition, the experiences of Naga women, and the Bible. On the need and importance of re-reading from Naga women’s perspective, Asangla Lemtur suggests the application of “contextual liberative hermeneutics.” For instance, in revisiting the temple act of Jesus in Mark 11:15–19 from the context of the exploitation and oppression of the weak and the voiceless, I draw insights into the socio-religio-political status of Naga women. Similarly, Atula Tzüdir transcends the traditional interpretation of Vashti in the Book of Esther and presents the narrative of Vashti as a liberative paradigm for women. In an attempt to reclaim the silenced voices and contributions of Naga women in the history of the Nagas, the non-canonical books are also taken into consideration. In one of my essays, the Book of Judith, the Protoevangelion, and the Gospel of the Birth of Mary are investigated to bring to light the silence concerning the experiences of women, their contributions in history, and their neglected stories. This method is then applied for recovering the silenced voices and contributions of the Naga women in the traditional Naga society.

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10 Shohe, “Protest with a Cause,” 127–139.
12 Shohe, “Transcending Beyond the Constructed Canon,” 90–112.
Traditionally, women were situated into what Naga men considered a ‘safe space’ apart from men to protect them from harm. Nevertheless, this ‘safe space’ restricted women’s participation and prevented women from exercising their vocation and responsibilities. This was mostly the private space, which was separated from public space. Tovi Fenster rightly points out, “Space is where we can see most tangibly that cultural citizenship values exclude women – literally. This is because cultural construction of space has inherent in its symbolism the legitimacy to exclude women from power and influence.”

This male definition of space constitutes the ‘male common’ that excludes women: ‘belonging’ is male-dominated. The Naga experience, for women, is not one of belonging but of exclusion, subordination, and oppression. One way to address this issue is to revisit the biblical perspective in Eph 2:11–22 by employing vocabularies and frameworks of postcolonial feminist reading.

4. The Structure of Ephesians 2:11-22

Interpreters generally divide the Epistle into two parts. The first part, consisting of the first through the third chapters, is an exposition of God’s plan for the world through Christ, while the second part, the fourth through the sixth chapters, is taken as an exhortation. This division becomes evident not only in the change from exposition to exhortation, but also, with the use of amen (ἀμήν) at the end of Ephesians 3 (Eph. 3:21). However, the two parts are not two different letters or sections that stand entirely on their own, but they are connected. In the first part the Gentile believers in Christ are reminded of their status as members of the church and in the second part the ethical appeals are brought out.

Ephesians 2 falls within the first part of the epistle where the author acknowledges God for the mercy and grace bestowed on the believers through Christ (Eph. 1-3). The beginning of Ephesians focuses on God’s desired plan for human kind, which is realised in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Thus, the reconciling work of God through the death of Jesus

14 I will not engage in the issue of authorship, but for the purpose of this essay, I will regard Paul as the supposed author.
results in the coming together of all the believers which appears again in Ephesians 12:13-22. The readers experience a new life through the grace of God. This grace is the gift of God through Christ and this is especially emphasised in Ephesians 2:1-10.

The contrast schema in Ephesians 2 between the old and new lives is brought out with the use of ποτε – pote (formerly, once) and νυνὶ δὲ -nuni de (but now). With the use of ποτε – pote in Ephesians 2:2, the author reminds his readers of their life before their belief in Christ. To the Gentiles, this is indicated with the use of ὑμᾶς -humas (you) in Ephesians 2:1 while referring to their trespasses and sins. With the use of νυνὶ δὲ -nuni de (but now) in Ephesians 2:13 we find a shift in the argument with regard to the reminder to the Gentiles. The present status of the believers with the use of νυνὶ δὲ -nuni de (but now) stands in contrast to the life experienced and lived by the Gentiles for which ποτε -pote (formerly, once) is used in Ephesians 2:11, 13. Such a shift from the old to the new identification and status is part of the faith of the early believers in Christ. This ποτε- νυνὶ (pote-nuni) antithesis in Ephesians 2:11-22 is brings out the previous life of readers as defined by Jewish standards, referred to as life “in the flesh,” and their present life “in Christ Jesus.” Some works judiciously use pre-Christian past and Christian present in reference to the past and present life of the readers in Ephesians. However, instead of comparing with the pre-Christian past, I interpret Eph. 2:11–13a along the terms of the ethnic-religious context of the Jews and Gentiles. The past life of the believers in Christ is described from a Jewish point of view: Gentiles in the flesh (Eph. 2:11), the uncircumcised (Eph. 2:11), being alienated from Israel (Eph. 2:12), strangers of the covenant of promise (Eph. 2:12) and far off from God’s presence (Eph. 2:13). From the point of view of faith in Christ, they are without Christ (Eph. 2:12), and no hope (Eph. 2:12). Their present life is described as those who are “near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13), reconciled to God by the cross (Eph. 2:16), having access to the father by one Spirit (Eph. 2:18), not strangers but fellow citizen of saints (Eph. 2:19), built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Jesus Christ being the corner stone (Eph. 2:20), and being part of the holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:21).

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16 Eph. 5:8–9; Heb. 12:26; 1 Pet. 1:14–15 (cf. Pss. 4; 9; 18; 34; 40).
17 See, Lincoln, Ephesians; John D. Grassmack, “The Old Man and the New Man: A Study in Pauline Theology.”
Thus, in line with the perspective of looking at Ephesians from a Jew-Gentile context of interpretation, the structure of thought in Ephesians 2:11-22 can be subdivided into three parts. The first part, in vv. 11–13, contrasts the past lives of the Gentile believers against the Jews as the privileged group. The second part, in vv. 14–18, highlights the present privileges and status as members of God’s family through Christ’s death. The cross becomes the starting point for peace and reconciliation between the Jews and the Gentiles through which both have access to God. The third part, in vv. 19–22, takes up the first part and summarises the privileges and status of the believers in Christ, which result in their shared belief. As part of the community of the people of God in their commonality, they grow into a holy temple of God (Eph. 2:20).\(^{18}\)

The above structural analysis will be explored using postcolonial vocabularies and frameworks. We will discuss the “other,” creating an inclusive space and the common in relation to belonging in the above text.

5. Situating the ‘Other’

The Jews considered themselves a privileged group and took pride as a covenant community, maintaining their distinct ethnic and religious identity by separating themselves. They considered themselves the “chosen people of God” and that it was their right to name the ‘other’ and situate them according to their standards of good and evil, accepted and rejected, pure and impure. This is reflected in Ephesians 2:11, where the Jews define the Gentiles as “in the flesh” and “those being called uncircumcised.” Name-giving is an important feature in situating the “other.” The naming of the “other” can either have a positive or negative impact. In the case of the Jewish and Gentile context, name-giving favoured the Jews by lifting their status in relation to the covenant given to the patriarchs in the Old Testament.\(^{19}\)

The reference to the “Gentile in flesh” is followed by the demarcation of “those being called uncircumcised” and “those being called circumcision in flesh made by hand” in Ephesians 2:11. The rite of circumcision is an exter-

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\(^{18}\) See also Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 131.; Grassmack, “The Old Man and the New Man,” 151.

\(^{19}\) This view is also discussed by Tet-Lim N. Yee, *Jews, Gentiles and the Ethnic Reconciliation: Paul’s Jewish Identity and Ephesians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 74–87. Tet-Lim N. Yee concludes that the intention of the author of Ephesians is to bring out the Jewish ethno-centric perception (87).
nal identity marker between Jews and Gentiles. Thus, the boundary marker in this verse between Jews and the non-Jews is the “flesh” – “Gentile in the flesh” in contrast to “circumcision in the flesh.” Uncircumcision refers to outsiders (Gen. 34:14; Acts 11:2-3; Rom. 2:26; 4:9; Gal. 2:7) and circumcision is used to identify the Jews (Rom. 3:1; 4:9; 15:8; Gal. 2:7-9). According to the “defining standards” of the Jews from the standpoint of the covenant, the Gentiles are defined as “Gentiles in flesh,” the “uncircumcision,” which together indicate the ‘other.’ The ‘flesh’ in relation to the Gentiles stands for the ‘other’, while for Jews, ‘flesh’ is used positively. In relation to the Jews ‘flesh’ symbolically defines their communion and belonging to a covenant community through the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 17. This understanding of themselves allowed the Jews to take pride as heirs of the covenant of God and to look with contempt on the Gentiles (1 Macc. 1:15–16; Jub. 15:25–34).

The notion of defining the ‘other’ as an ‘outsider’ continues in Ephesians 2:12 by defining the non-Jews as those “alienated from the politeia (common wealth) of Israel” and “strangers of the covenants of promise.” These definitions explicitly situate the Gentiles outside the boundary of the accepted norm from the “Jewish standards of the covenant.” “Israel” refers to the Jews in relation to election and covenant promise. In Ephesians 2:12, with the mention of “circumcision” and “uncircumcision”, “Israel” is probably used in reference to Jewish self-understanding as the chosen and the privileged group in the covenant of God. Hence, “the politeia (common wealth) of Israel” can be understood as a group of people practicing and preserving their ancestral beliefs and way of life as an exclusive community. The Gentiles “in flesh,” “the uncircumcised” were situated outside the common wealth of Israel as the “other.” The covenant to the patriarchs became the boundary marker from the standpoint of the Jews who name and situate the ‘other’ from the standpoint of the covenant. However, Ephesians 2:13 refers to the creating of an ‘inclusive space’ a topic to which we now turn.

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20 Also Yee, Jews, Gentiles and the Ethnic Reconciliation, 74-76.
6. Creating an ‘Inclusive Space’

From the above interpretation of Ephesians 2:11-12 we see that the Gentiles/non-Jews are defined and situated from the standpoint of the Jewish covenant history. The Gentiles, according to Jewish standards of definition, stand outside the boundary of the covenant God made with the patriarchs. However, from Ephesians 2:13 onwards the author is referring to the place of the Gentiles through Christ. Yet before we go into the interpretation from Christ’s point of view, let us examine the phrase “far off” in Ephesians 2:13. Some scholars argue that the author of Ephesians uses the language of Isaiah in Ephesians 2:13-18 to argue that the “new” in Ephesians 2:13 is not a contrast with the Jews, but with their old life of alienation from Christ. Since the Gentiles live a life outside the community of Christ, they are “far away” from Christ.

Still, keeping in mind the ethnic-religious interpretation of Ephesians 2:11-12, “those being far off” should be interpreted in an ethnic-religious context, i.e., from the Jewish covenant standpoint of Gentiles as ‘outsider’ and the ‘other.’ The following phrase “being near” in Ephesians 2:13 would refer to the place of the Gentiles’ relationship with the Jews through Christ. This new relationship, according to Terrence Donaldson, is possible for the Gentiles without becoming Jews. From Ephesians 2:13b onwards the question of becoming a Jew or not is secondary because in redefining relationship in Christ, there is a shift from exclusive identity based on the Israelite covenant religion to a common identity as children of God.

From the ethnic-religious perspective, a wall existed between Israel and the Gentiles. The Greek verb λύσας -lusas (Eph. 2:14), which comes from

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22 Allusions to Isaiah 9:5-6; 52:7; 57:19.
24 In fact, this phrase need not necessarily be attached to Isaiah as the language of “far off” and “near” is common in the Old Testament, e.g., Deut 30:11-14; Ezek 6:11-12.
the root \( \text{luō} \) has varied meanings, “to loose,” “to destroy,” “to untie,” “to set free” and “to put to end”.\(^{26}\) There are different ways of understanding this dividing wall. One hypothesis is that \( \mu\varepsilon\sigma\omicron\omicron\upsilon\sigma\omicron\varsigma - \text{mesotoichos} \) (middle wall) refers to the wall that fenced the Jewish and the Gentile courts inside the Jerusalem temple.\(^{27}\) Another hypothesis is that \( \mu\varepsilon\sigma\omicron\omicron\upsilon\sigma\omicron\tau\omicron\nu \phi\rho\alpha\gamma\mu\omicron\omicron\nu - \text{mesotoichos tou phragmou} \) (middle wall of partition) refers to a part or the whole of the Mosaic Torah that divided the Jews and the Gentiles. The “ritual law” stood as a barrier between the Jews and the non-Jews.\(^{28}\)

References to “Gentiles in flesh,” “circumcision,” – “uncircumcised” and “covenant” point to the barrier between Jews and the Gentiles as referring to the Jewish way of life. The strict demarcation from the Jewish covenant defining standards between Jews and the Gentiles are to be brought down not by demanding that the Gentiles become Jews but by providing them with an identity and sense of belonging that comes from the standpoint of Christ.

### 7. The Common in Relation to Belonging

Ephesians 2:13-18 focuses on creating space for the Gentiles in Christ by references to “blood of Christ,” “in his flesh,” “in himself,” “through the cross,” and “through him”. It is through the cross of Christ (Eph. 2:16) that both Jewish and Gentile believers have a common standing before God. The cross of Christ becomes the basis for unity within the family of God; belonging is not tied to ethnicity, but to the saving work of Christ.

Gentiles are now included in the blessing of Abraham and the patriarchs. The blessing of the Gentiles falls in line with the promise made to Abraham, that all the nations would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:1-3; 26 Büchsel, “\( \text{λύω} \),” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. IV. In John 2:19 \( \text{luō} \) is used for demolition of the shrine and in Acts 27:41 it is used for the destruction of the ship. In Ephesians 2:14 the object of the verb \( \text{lusas} \) is “\( \text{to mesotoichon tou phragmou} \) translated as the middle wall (dividing wall) of partition. This indicates that there is a partition wall between the Jews and the non-Jews and the author is referring to loosening the wall of partition.


22:18). However, the inclusion of the Gentiles is not as a separate community but the Gentiles are included together with the Jews into the blessing of Abraham and the patriarchs. This is especially emphasised with the use of συμπολίται -sumpolitai (fellow citizens with, Eph. 2:19) in which Gentiles join Israel as members in God’s commonwealth. 29 As such, Jews and Gentiles together “grow into a holy shrine in the Lord” (Eph. 2:20-21). The defining identity takes place through the Spirit-guided relationship where both the Jews and the Gentiles experience relational freedom (Eph. 2:18). 30 In such a context believers in Christ experience the sense of belonging. Thus, the atoning works of Jesus Christ redefines ‘common’ and ‘belonging.’ From a Christ-centred relationship, ‘space’ is defined from the standpoint of inclusion. In this regard, the inclusive space also redefines the ‘common’ in contrast to the dominant group’s redefinition of the ‘common.’ In this understanding of ‘common’ as inclusive, one experiences a sense of belonging.

8. Conclusion: Redefining Relationships in the Context of Naga Women

From the above investigation of Ephesians 2:11-22 we have highlighted some important aspects of ‘other,’ ‘space,’ ‘common’ and ‘belonging.’ Our analysis of the text shows that when defining a group from the standpoint of the dominant, there is always a tendency to situate the ‘other’ as an ‘outsider’ with no sense of belonging. It is by creating an inclusive ‘space’ that one will experience a sense of belonging. With such a rich text before us, it is vital for this essay to ask what the exhortation of Ephesians has to say about the notion of the ‘common’ and of ‘belonging’ in the context of Naga women.

For generations, some oppressive and dominant traditional and cultural values have dominated the Naga people’s mindset, even more than biblical teachings. However, as Christians for whom Bible is important, the Nagas need to let the biblical values be reflected in personal, social, political,

community, civil and religious life. Thus, there is a need to redefine relationships, not from the dominant standpoint, but through Christ. In doing so, women can also be part of the larger society and experience a sense of belonging.

First is the need to define the identity of women. According to patriarchal ideology, women are identified as the weaker group, outside the male ‘common,’ and restricted to the private sphere. However, just as Jews are not to regard non-Jews according to Jewish standards but to create an inclusive space, so also Naga society needs to move beyond patriarchal ideology to create a space where members are not stereotyped by gender roles and where women’s participation is not limited to a subordinate role.

The second area is to define common’ and ‘belonging.’ In Naga society, the private and public spaces are separated, and only men have access to both. Hence the ‘common’ is also ‘men’s common,’ which excludes women’s experiences. However, the text from Ephesians does not connect ‘common’ to the dominant but to the redeeming grace of Christ. ‘Belonging’ is not tied to ethnicity but to the saving work of Christ who has loosened the rigid walls and created an inclusive space that creates a sense of belonging. As Nagas, our ‘common belief’ in Christ should enable us to redefine relationships not from the standpoint of the dominant but from Christ’s standpoint so that we can progress together as a community.

References


Slavery and liberty – a postcolonial reading of 1 Peter

JISK STEETSKAMP

The following interpretation of the First Epistle General of Peter is in principle based on close reading with an open eye for the literary characteristics and an open ear for the theological substance of the text. The conflicting signals in the text create the impression that they are the result of an intentional strategy. Postcolonial criticism helps to understand the contradictions as a mode of communication that hides its potential for resistance under a surface of conformity and subordination.

In the first line of the fifth chapter 1 Peter looks back to the martyrdom of the Apostle Peter. First Peter is therefore a pseudepigraph, and presumably written under the reign of Trajan (98-117) by a presbyter, who was a Jewish slave.¹

1. Perpetuating imperial ideology?

Reading the text of 1 Peter may result in ambiguous feelings. Especially the instructions in the second and the third Chapter may provoke us: here we meet repeatedly the admonition to be submissive and prepared for suffering. The Addressees of the Letter must submit to the emperor and his governors, slaves have to submit to their masters, even if they are unjust and brutal, and wives ought to submit to their husbands, trying to win them over by keeping quiet “without a word” (3.1) and behaving in an exemplary fashion. Jennifer G. Bird explains in the introduction to her study on 1 Peter: “A young couple, my upstairs neighbors, fought more nights of the week than not. These arguments ... ended with the young woman being beaten or thrown around by her lover, who also was the father of her child ... I could not help but wonder if the woman I heard was scared into staying in part because of socio-religious beliefs that told her that her suffering made her Christ-like and she might ‘win over’ her partner if she would

¹ See Jisk Steetskamp, Autorschaft und Sklavenperspektive im Ersten Petrusbrief (WUNT 524), Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2020.
patiently forgive him and bear the abuse: thoughts drawn directly from the second and third chapter of 1 Peter.” Jennifer Bird recognizes in 1 Peter a taking over of Greco-Roman socio-cultural and hierarchical order. Her thesis is that 1Peter belongs to the “many texts in the Christian canon that perpetuate imperial ideology.”

It is sensible to take this critique on 1 Peter seriously. At question is not only the history of the reception of 1 Peter, but also the text of the epistle itself. Why on earth should we accept, that the subordination of slaves and wives and young people as 1 Peter demands, is normal? We have to be grateful to Jennifer Bird’s disagreement. One could of course say, that the reading of 1Peter from Jennifer Bird’s point of view leads unescapable to the thesis that the letter perpetuates imperial ideology. Indeed, the argumentation is not free of circular reasoning. But postcolonial criticism describes inter alia the connectedness of the dominating culture with the culture of subordinates. In 1 Peter you can recognize this for example in the particular adaption of the Hellenistic idea of kalòs kai agathós, noble and good, and the associated verb agathopoiéoo, doing good. The Greek words indicate the social status of people who have the power and wealth to excel as public benefactors. Were this all, one could actually say, that imperial ideology is perpetuated here. The imperious language of civic benefaction however, that marks ruling by the way of bread and games and by means of extensive building activity, transfers the epistle into the social environment of slaves and the outcasts of the empire. This is also not only a mimicry of current imperial usage, but also and far more a symbolic inversion with an eschatological character and within the group of the addressees a real social inversion.

2. A hidden transcript

Even if we realize that 1 Peter is not simply an early Christian update of imperial ideology, the critique of Jennifer Bird on 1 Peter cannot just be brushed aside. As every text it contains indications of the implied readership, the addressees who should recognize what is being said especially


to them. The text however anticipates also reader who need to be led astray, “so that seeing they may see but never perceive; and hearing they may hear but never understand ...” (Mark 4.12). On the surface 1 Peter suggests that its text is a harmless religious product preaching subordination and quiescence to Peter’s followers. The surface of the text protects the intended addressees in a distrustful environment. Nevertheless, the epistle provides, beneath the surface, a subtext, that works as a hidden transcript of resistance coming from the exodus narrative. The political scientist James Scott introduced the concept of hidden transcripts as “modes of discourse generally kept hidden from the public stage, where the official, sanctioned transcript dominates”. As Christian church become powerful 1 Peter was predominantly understood in the superficial way for a very long time. Representative for this understanding is Martin Luther’s preface to 1 Peter in his bible edition of 1545. In behalf of the second and third chapters of 1 Peter he sums up: “First he tells the congregation to obey the public authority. Furthermore, in particular the servants must be subjugated to their masters and might even be treated unjustly by them for the sake of Christ, who suffered unjustly for us. Wives must obey their husbands, even if they are non-believers.” Here there is no idea at all for creative resistance that the text is able to unfold to its implied readers.

The author’s strategy of resisting operates technically with reading instructions and ambiguities in the use of key terms; it works through undermining the subordination paraenesis, and last, but not least by the connection of the slave destiny with the concept of Christology and the main perspective of the epistle. The resisting strategy of 1 Peter constitutes substantially a new invocation of the Exodus tradition. In 1.13 the letter-body begins with the amazing phrase: “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind”, words that recall the night of Passover when the Hebrews make themselves ready for the escape from Egyptian slavery (see Ex 12.11). This appeal to the mind turns the line into a reading instruction

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which means: What now follows has to be understand in the spirit of Exodus. The identification of the addressees as “an elect stock, a royal priesthood, a holy people, a nation for God’s possession, so that you might announce the wondrous acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light”, includes a strong link to Exodus 19 (2.9). This people, endowed with these significant designations of Israel, have eventually to accept humility with respect “to God’s mighty hand” (5.6), that once brought the Israelites out of bondage. In one breath is said that this humility must be also the basic orientation of the relations of the addressees among themselves. The choice of words is noteworthy: “put on humility as a slave apron in your relations with one another” (5.5b). Humility as we understand it nowadays is a problematic topic, often associated with the idea of unworthy humbleness. The Greek equivalent tapeinophrosynè, however, describes the attitude of the humble in solidarity with each another. The concept of tapeinophrosynè was introduced by the apostle Paul in the early Christian discourse. Summarizing all previous paraenesis 1 Peter invites the addressees in 5.5b ultimately to meet one another in the humility of slaves. The addressees have thus to assume slave perspective in dealing with one another and in dealing with the social surroundings. It includes the outlaw position. According to Roman law slaves are per se representatives of the hostile outside world. It is therefore plausible that the Latin word captivus, prisoner of war, indicates in a more general sense a slave. In consequence of the slave perspective of the epistle, all addressees are emphatic referred to as strangers (1.1; 2.11) and aliens (2.11). To be exact, 1 Peter sees them as Jewish strangers, thus as strangers in the Diaspora, rooted in the story of Israel, the only people in the midst of the Roman Empire whose Romanizing has failed. Hence the key objective of 1 Peter is not to negotiate for better place in the majority society. Seeking to bridge the gap between the addressees and their neighbors the epistle uses the concept of shalom of Psalm 34 (3.8-12). It’s all about building a new and different social reality of justice, freedom and sincere mutual love and solidarity on the underside of the Empire.

3. Positioning

Directly in the exhortations to the subjects, slaves and wives, so in the most provocative section, the text takes advantage of the ambiguity of

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the most questionable word: be subordinate. *Hypotágete,* submit yourself (2.13), is not only the beginning of the instructions to the subjects of the Empire, but also the opening aoristic imperative that governs the following participles of same verb in the paraenesis of the slaves und wives (2.18; 3.1). The political start of the paraenesis lends all three issues a political character. It indicates to the public arena that nothing here will disturb the traditional hierarchies. In his first Letter to the Philippians Polycarp notes, that he has attached the Letters of Ignatius (1.2). To attach is expressed here with the Verb *hypotasso,* that means to append to a document or a postscript to a letter. If you apply this to 1Peter, the verb denotes, alternatively to the dominant meaning of being subordinate, so to speak a human postscript to the narrative of the Empire. In this meaning the aorist tense of *hypotasso* describes the positioning of the addressees below the hierarchical structures of the Empire: it is even the formal position of slaves. In the context of 1Peter it is the position of the solidarity of the outcasts, the position of the liberty not to be a player in the hierarchical machinations of the Empire. Principal freedom is set out in 2.16, where the addressees are referred to as “those who are free”. The apposition “without having this freedom as a pretext for evil, but as God’s slaves” verifies that freedom is here more than a spiritual freedom. Exercising this freedom, the epistle designates the political constitution of the empire as “human creation” (2.13). In the New Testament only 1 Peter refers to God as “faithful creator” (4.19), a critical hint at the empire as “human creation” and to the Roman emperors who consider themselves as creators of a new Rom and a new world. Thereby the epistle dismantles the imperial claim for sacredness. According to 1 Peter, the emperor must only be respected as a human being with a special political function. More important than this is love for the brother- and sisterhood of the addressees and awe of God (2.16). The *mos maiorum,* ancestral custom, the ideological framework of the Empire, is evaluated by 1 Peter as *mátaios,* worthless, futile, empty (1.18).

4. Slaves, slave Christology and liberty

Out of this political understanding, 1 Peter unfolds in 2.18-2.25 the slave paraenesis with its connected Christology. This section constitutes the heart of the epistle. A little bit individualizing of the daily conflict situation of the addressees presents the face of a slave who suffers unjustly under a master that is *skoliós,* crooked, twisted, harsh, vicious (2.18). The word *skoliós* is normally used of slaves, it is now ironically applied to slave
owners. Because of the metaphor hypogrammós, a template for children to learn the alphabet (2.21), we can imagine the slave being a teacher. First Peter says: If this slave would be beaten because his sins, that would not be remarkable. But if he were beaten for doing a good work, maybe something like helping another slave, anyhow a good work that irritated his master who treated him cruelly, this would be so. If the slave would endure this without grumbling, this would be grace, because of God’s knowing about his unjust suffering (2.19-20). The common translation “because of his consciousness of God” must be called into question. The slave in this section functions paradigmatically, precisely because he or she is a slave, not inasmuch as he is a Christian. It is God’s seeing his fate in slavery, just as he saw the suffering of the Hebrew slaves in Exodus 3.9: “I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them”. God’s awareness of the slaves’ suffering is the origin of grace. The slave is not only the paradigm of the addressees, he is, in a way, also paradigm of the Messiah, for Christ suffered and died as a slave. His crucifixion was the ultimate penalty for slaves. The Latin expression servile supplicium designates the slave punishment of being tortured to death on the cross. Conversely, the suffering and dying Christ is a paradigm to the slaves: No deceit was found in his mouth, he did not insult in return, he did not threaten, he brings his cause to him, who judges justly (2.23). This is summarized: He committed no sin. We recognize in this Christology the echo of Isaiah 53. Indeed, the author of 1 Peter weaves phrases from Isaiah 53 in such a way into his own text that he is able to remind slaves “forcibly that Jesus’ identification with them in their suffering could not have been more concrete and complete, short of literally being sold into slavery, so that his example is binding even upon them”. It is not his purpose to install a theology of atonement, but to pave a way out of the sphere of influence of the Empire. While not acting in the unjust imperial ways, but confiding himself to the justice of God, the faithful creator and reliable founder of another realm, in his suffer-

7 See Martin Vahrenhorst, Der erste Brief des Petrus (Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament Band 19), Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 2016, p. 123.
ing and death he moves out of the sphere of influence of the Empire. Sin in this context is to be caught up in the unjust mechanisms of imperial life. In 4.15 ensues the admonition: “Let none of you suffer as a murderer, thief, or evildoer, or as one who defrauds others.” This seems to be a superfluous remark, but excessive brutal treatment could result murderous assaults on slaveowners. “Actions of lying, cheating and stealing, of pretending to be sick or working on calculatedly slow pace, of resorting in fact to any form of petty sabotage” were possible instruments to frustrate the owners. R. S. Sugirtharajah says in ‘Postcolonial criticism and Biblical Interpretation’: “There are two aspects: first, to analyze the diverse strategies by which the colonizers constructed images of the colonized; and second, to study how the colonized themselves made use of and went beyond many of those strategies in order to articulate their identity, self-worth, and empowerment.” 12 1 Peter however blocks off forms of resistance by making use of imperial proceedings of action. Copying imperial features is sin. The coming kingdom of God cannot be a copy of the Empire at all. This is the concrete meaning of the statements, that Christ in suffering and death committed no sin and that he “bore our sin on the tree” (2.24). The cross of Christ is the vanishing point of all violence and mightiness. Christ suffered on “your behalf”, for Christ’s death opens this vanishing point to all who “follow his footsteps” (2.21). Therefore, this Christological segment does not write down a word to the resurrection of Christ. Yet there is a resurrection in it. All this happens “in order that we are removed from sins and might live to righteousness” (2.24). Note the use of first-person plural here: this slave-Christology effects the resurrection of all to the search for justice beyond the pattern of imperial practice. At the beginning of the epistle the resurrection of Christ establishes the eschatological hope of the addressees. In the slave-Christology in the heart of the epistle, slaves and others are no longer just an object of oppression but are transformed into fellow humans and are liberated to live for justice. This fundamental transformation constitutes the foundation their freedom.

Finally, reading 1 Peter in the context of postcolonial discourse is not simply another methodological approach. The postcolonial perspective allows us to perceive author and addressees as marginalized people with

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specific concerns and needs, and subversive strategies. It encourages us to take their life seriously and provides the critical parameters to re-evaluate the text. Some scholars interpret 1 Peter as a *Preparatio ad martyrium*, as a preparation for suffering martyrdom. 13 There are good reasons to follow them in this train of thought: 1 Peter is dealing with matters of life and death. This even holds when considering the key notion of the resurrection for living to righteousness in 2.24 as a preparation for living dedicated to justice. In circumstances of exclusion and persecution, the epistle offers a guideline to the question: How will you be free to justice with nothing to draw around you but your hope. 14


14 See the line of the poet William Stanley Merwin in ‘Envoy from d’Aubigné: “Child How will you survive with nothing but your virtue to draw around you When they shout Die die.”
Towards a non-hierarchical order of creation
A contrapuntal reading of Genesis and Purusa-Sukta creation narratives

ARAVIND JEYAKUMAR MONIRAJ

Introduction

Every culture of the world has creation stories which attempt to trace the origin of the universe and its components with special reference to human beings. These stories are conditioned by the religious, cultural, social, and political context from which they originate. The same is true of the interpretations of these narratives: they derive from a particular location. As such, creation stories may be used to explain and justify certain political, religious, and social realities that are oppressive and discriminatory. Such is the case with the Genesis creation narratives and the Hindu Purusa-Sukta creation accounts. In the context of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics, religious texts which advocate hierarchy or discrimination have to be confronted and resisted. Similarly, those texts cannot be completely ignored since they are considered as sacred texts of different religions. Hence, contrapuntal reading which is a postcolonial-liberative hermeneutics also attempts to read different texts to bring out the voices of the insider and the outsider. Keeping this as an interpretive tool, this short paper attempts to read the Genesis and Purusa-Sukta creation accounts from their traditional rendering in order to unearth the hierarchical elements which has fostered inequity and repression through the centuries. Then I will explore an egalitarian liberative re-reading of both accounts as a model of postcolonial contrapuntal reading.

1. Defining Contrapuntal Hermeneutics

The term “contrapuntal” (or counterpart) is derived from the field of music. However, this concept has been adopted in the field of literature in

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1 The term contrapuntal or counterpoint has a long musical history and the following are some of the definitions: “one or more independent melodies added above or below a given melody;”
analyzing various texts. Edward Said\(^2\) is one of the prolific thinkers of contrapuntal reading and he defines it as an attempt to bring various interpretive voices into conjunction without harmonizing them in order to emphasize the importance and the uniqueness of each voice in contrast with other voices.\(^3\) Further, SAID claims that different voices or texts should be read contrapuntally from the social contexts of the former colonizer (oppressor) as well as the former colonized (oppressed) in order make scope for counterpoint.\(^4\) This approach rejects the arguments for ethnic or disciplinary centrism, narrow nationalism, and uncritical solidarity; therefore, this method aims at avoiding the consequences of various centrisms without denying the importance of context and particularity, providing a space in which a variety of particular voices can contribute to a dialogic intellectual process.\(^5\) Hence, SAID argues that contrapuntal approach is a politically and ethically responsible way to interpret texts in the trans-modern, postcolonial world, which necessarily involves questions of power and the relationship of knowledge to power.\(^6\)

2. Contrapuntal Approach to the Religious Texts

Religious texts are considered as sacred writings which claim universality and the concept of truth. Therefore, the canonized texts of different religions become yardsticks of advocating single standard of human behavior and human justice in their confined cultural contexts (or sometimes

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\(^6\) Cf. Nelson, “Job in Conversation.”
Due to this I perceive that religious texts in their presentation/interpretations or in the process of their reception became tools of oppression either by creating hierarchical structures or dividing people into different class or caste structures. Therefore, one of the objectives of using the contrapuntal reading is to analyze the religious texts and to bring forth the dissenting voices and re-read the texts from the liberative perspective in order to ensure an egalitarian or non-hierarchical order of creation. Thus, in contrast to the simple comparative analysis, contrapuntal reading here emphasizes the process of crossing-boundaries to analyze the consequences that the texts have brought through their reading and interpretations. However, my significant analysis of the religious texts will not be limited to dialoguing with the texts, rather the voices of the outsiders would be integrated in the form of re-interpreting the religious texts as a praxiological move in order to consider some of the concerns of postcolonial and liberative perspectives. With this outlook the present study aims at reading the creation narrative from the book of Genesis and a creation narrative called Purusa-Sukta which is one of the oldest narratives from the ancient Hindu text Rig-Veda. The following steps will be undertaken in order to engage in a contrapuntal-liberative hermeneutics: Firstly, a brief overview of both the creation narratives with their significant traditional rendering will be presented; secondly, the similarities and dissimilarities of the creation accounts and especially the hierarchical and oppressive structures which came in to being through their interpretations will be dealt in detail; finally a re-reading of both the narratives form a liberative perspective will be done in order to emphasize a non-hierarchical order of creation.

3. A Brief Overview of the Genesis and Rig-Vedic Creation Narratives

Stories of origins are the outcome of the human curiosity to know how the world came into existence. These narratives are referred as creation stories, stories of origin or beginnings, creation myths, cosmogonies, or cosmologies. The understanding of the origin of the world and the doctrine of creation varies from one context to the other. These myths/stories were influenced by the culture(s), religion(s), linguistic and political ideologies which were present in different contexts.

3.1 Genesis Creation Narratives

The Genesis creation narratives (Genesis 1 and 2) are the important biblical accounts of creation which enumerate the origin of the entire cosmos. OT scholarship observes that the biblical creation narratives have ancient near eastern influences, however, they were presented based on the Israelites convictions with the monotheistic outlook by underscoring Yahweh as the unique and sole creator. The first creation account of Genesis (1:1-2:3) describes the creation of the world by Elohim (God). God created everything in the universe which includes all heavenly bodies (every star and planet) as well as everything on the earth by means of divine sanction in six days. Man and woman were created in the image of God and were given the task to steward and subdue the earth. The second creation account of Genesis (2:4-25) presents a different creation story. The first man, Adam was formed by Yahweh from the clay (or dust) and into whom He ‘breathed’ the ‘breath of life.’ Then vegetation and animals were formed which was followed by the creation of the first woman Eve who was formed from the rib of the first man, Adam. God planted a garden “east of Eden” into which He placed the first couple. The following chapters of Genesis (esp.3) record the fall of humankind and the subsequent consequences which they faced.

3.2 Purusa-Sukta Creation Account

There is not one Hindu creation story. Numerous cosmogonies can be found in almost all of the important Hindu scriptures and there are many interpretations for those creation myths. They are all representations of the main principle of Brahman, who is described as being “everywhere and nowhere, everything and nothing.” Creation came from Brahman’s thought, or the actions of the god Brahma, who is the representation of Brahman as a man. According to the Purusa-Sukta creation hymn (Rig-Veda Book: X. Hymn: 90), creation is the result of the sacrifice of Purusha (Man), the primeval being, who is all that exists, including “whatever has been and whatever is to be.” When Purusha, who had “a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, and a thousand feet,” was sacrificed, the clarified butter that resulted was made into the beasts which inhabit the earth. From the dismemberment

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8 Summary of the story of creation from Genesis chapters 1 and 2
9 Creation stories are also present in other books of the OT such as wisdom literature, prophetic writings and in the book of Psalms.
10 Summary of the creation account is from the following translation: The Sacred Writings: Hinduism – The Rig Veda Ralph (Trans. T.H. GRIFFITH; 1992).
came also the animals, plants, rituals, sacred words, and the Vedas. This same sacrifice produced the gods, Indra (the menacing king of gods), Agni (Fire), Vayu (Wind), as well as the Sun and Moon. From Purusha’s navel the atmosphere was born; his head produced the heaven, his feet produced the earth, his ear the sky, his mind the moon, his eye the sun, his breath the wind, his feet the earth, and his belly button the atmosphere. The four varnas (castes in the Indian society) were also born from Purusha: the mouth was the Brahman (priest), the arms the Kshatriya (warrior), the thigh the Vaishya (general populace), and the feet the Sudra (servant). For centuries the sudras and the outcastes (Dalits) have been treated as lesser humans by the so-called upper dominant castes. This creation hymn is underscored in all later Hindu scriptures to sanction the caste system as divine ordination. Thus India follows a social caste structure based on this ancient creation narrative.

4. **Significance of Biblical and Rig-Vedic Creation Narratives**

Every creation narrative has its own significance in the manner in which it presents the origin of this world and with special reference to humankind. The Biblical creation narrative is also a polemic and counter-narrative against the polytheistic understanding of gods and goddesses and the way the world came into existence in the ANE context. Secondly, Israelites had their faith journey with Yahweh as their liberator and savior; this insight made them to picturize Yahweh as the sole creator against the polytheistic and violent attitude of creation recorded in the ANE texts (esp. Enuma Elish: The Babylonian Epic of Creation). Thus Israelites’ doctrine of creation originated from such a polytheistic ANE context. Similarly, the Rig-Vedic people had their own concept of God and the world. The earth was revered as mother; nature was worshipped as God and so on. There are many stories of creation with different understandings of origin of the world which were created by numerous gods but these different gods or goddesses were attributed to the ultimate and the Supreme Being called Brahma. However, the ancient text Rig-Veda has presented how through the sacrifice of the Supreme Being – Brahma (the cosmic person) the world came into existence and it is much more significant and ancient than the other Hindu creation narratives, therefore it is significant from the other creation accounts.
5. Similarities and Dissimilarities of Creationism in Genesis and the Rig-Veda

The following lines would like to list out some of the similarities and dissimilarities which one can observe from the Genesis and Rig-Vedic creation accounts:

5.1 Similarities in Both the Creation Narratives

Both the creation narratives emphasize God/Brahma as the source and giver of life.\(^\text{11}\) Thus both the creation narratives attribute the creative work to Yahweh, Yahweh-Elohim and to Brahma respectively.

Creation by the creative word of God is emphasized in the Genesis creation narrative. In Hinduism the similar creative work can be traced from another creation hymn called the Nasadiya Sukta\(^\text{12}\) creation narrative found in Rig-Veda.\(^\text{13}\)

Genesis account mentions that God created light – “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” Light was also created in the Rig-Veda, “O Agni, you who gleam in the darkness, to you we come day by day, with devotion and bearing homage;” Thus, the creation of light is recorded both in Genesis as well as in Rig-Veda.\(^\text{14}\)

Creation of humankind in the image and likeness of God is unique to the Genesis account. But Purusa-Sukta also emphasizes creation of humankind from different parts of the body of Brahma, nevertheless, from the same substance (flesh).

God’s human-centric anthropomorphic nature of creating the universe is seen in both the creation narratives (Genesis 2 and Purusa-Sukta).

5.2 Dissimilarities in Both the Creation Narratives

Genesis creation narrative insists Yahweh-Elohim as the creator of the universe which is against the polytheistic idea of creation in ANE (esp. Enuma Elish). Hindu creation narratives are more in number, there are different


\(^{12}\) Rig-Veda X: 129. Cf. Chapter III: 3.3.1.1.

\(^{13}\) Talreja, Holy Vedas and Holy Bibles, 57.

\(^{14}\) Talreja, Holy Vedas and Holy Bibles, 58.
accounts and different deities involved and different modes used in creating this world and humankind.

Genesis creation narrative presents that the process of creation took place in a peaceful manner. But the later period Hindu literatures present creation in an unusual and violent manner as that of the ANE narratives.

Creation of human beings in the image and likeness of God is the specialty of Genesis creation narrative which implicitly emphasizes that humankind possess the divine nature. But the Purusa-Sukta creation hymn segregates human beings created from the same Brahma into different castes.

Genesis affirms the creation of man and woman, but creation of woman is seen only in a few creation stories of Hinduism.

6. Hierarchical Oppressive Structures in the Creation Narratives

The above lines enumerated an overview and an adequate understanding of how the creation accounts depict and interpret the act of creation. However, one cannot deny the fact that these creation accounts have contributed to the hierarchical and discriminative structure that we witness in our present day life both in the church and the society. Therefore, as an exercise of attempting to read the text as an outsider or the oppressed (an element of the contrapuntal reading), I would like to understand how the hierarchical elements are embedded in both the creation narratives (Genesis 1 and 2 and Purusa-Sukta – Rig-Veda X.90) which have certainly shaped our understanding based on the traditional interpretations of these creation accounts.

6.1 Hierarchical Structures in Genesis Creation Account:
I observe that the presentation or interpretation of the Genesis creation narrative paved way for certain hierarchical structures, namely:

1. God is presented as a transcended ruler over the whole creation, for e.g. God commands, and controls as a ruler are some of the ideas transmitted over the centuries by most of the commentators.
2. God is presented as the sole creator who alone has acted and fully involved in the process of creation and there is no involvement of the creatures in process of creation.

3. God is presented as superior over the entire creation and the creatures have to subdued or subordinate to the sole creator.

4. Man was created first and woman was created from man. This led to the understanding today that men are superior. Because woman was created after man that too from his rib, she is an inferior being who is always a subordinate to him.

5. The creation accounts of Genesis has created a transcendental relationship between God and Human beings, God and nature; and even between man and woman.

6. Instead of advocating a horizontal relationship with equality with one another a hierarchical structural model with differences between God and creation was interpolated or interpreted and until today has been accepted as the created order by God.

6.2 Hierarchical Structures in Purusa-Sukta Creation Account:
The hierarchical structures which the Purusa-Sukta creation account attest are as follows:

1. Purusa-Sukta creation account depicts the creation of human beings and the whole world and its components from the body of the cosmic person – Supreme Being, when He was sacrificed.

2. Through the sacrifice, human beings were formed from different parts of the body of Brahma which eventually gave rise to different caste sections in the society – namely, Brahmans formed from the mouth of Brahma, Kshatriya from the arms, Vaisyas from the thighs and the Sudras from the feet, thus caste hierarchy was legitimized through this creation narrative, which exists even in Indian society today irrespective of religious backgrounds.

3. This creation narrative has produced a hierarchical structure based on caste stating that this is how human beings were created by Brahma, so
people from the ‘so-called’ lower caste in the society who were created from the feet of Brahma had to serve the rest of the people who were created from the upper part of the body of Brahman without any hesitation.

4. This creation account instituted segregation among human beings based on their birth. Inter-caste-marriages were not encouraged in order to follow and preserve the sanctity of the individual casts and if this rule is violated the consequence is honor killings (killing those who cross the caste boundary).

5. This hierarchical structure has oppressed one section of the society for ages and forced them to believe that this was the actual created order and this has been attested in all the later Hindu sacred writings.

7. **Liberative Insights from the Re-reading of Genesis and Purusa-Sukta Creation narratives**

The religious texts, especially in this case the creation narratives from Genesis and Purusa-Sukta have presented the origin of the entire cosmos which were highlighted in the above paragraphs contrapuntally. However, the contrapuntal presentation has also cited that the oppressive elements which are embedded in the above mentioned creation narratives have paved for hierarchical structures and segregation of humankind in the name of caste esp. in the Indian society. However, one of the objectives of the contrapuntal reading is to engage in a postcolonial liberative hermeneutics. Therefore, I perceive that the religious texts which were used to enforce subjugation and hierarchical structures can also be re-read and re-interpreted from the liberative and egalitarian point of view in order to eradicate any form or discrimination. Hence, I attempt to re-read the Genesis and Purusa-Sukta creation accounts in order to draw the liberative and egalitarian elements embedded in both the texts.

7.1 **Genesis Creation Account Re-read (Gen. 1 & 2)**

A liberative/egalitarian reading of the Genesis creation account presents the following insights: God is the source of all creation. God is creator, but at the same time God's re-active and re-creative aspects in the process of creation are emphasized. While the image of the deity as transcendent in Genesis 1 detaches God from humanity and nature, the anthropomorphic picture of God in Genesis 2–3 emphasizes God's activity in the crea-
tive process and humankind’s active role along with God. Creatures participate with God in creation by separating, ruling, developing, and reproducing; this emphasizes their involvement as co-creators along with God. God does not place Himself above all else but rather works alongside the rest of creation. This reading dismantles the traditional and colonial idea of God as king or ruler and establishes a smooth nexus between God, humans, and the natural world. Moreover, both male and female are created in the image and likeness of God. Here, both man and woman have the freedom to think and express themselves without fear; both have self-dignity and self-respect. The creation of woman after man from his rib does not imply hierarchy, but rather it brings completion and wholeness. Their physical oneness, commonality of concern, and loyalty and responsibility to one another are emphasized. The spirit of God breathed into human beings highlights that both man and woman share divine life and breath.

7.2 Purusa-Sukta Creation Account Re-read
An egalitarian re-reading of Purusa-Sukta focuses on the fact that every human being is from the cosmic person, Brahma, the Supreme Being, so there should not be any inequality among human beings in the name of caste. Brahma is the source of all creation. Everything originates from Him and into Him all is absorbed. Since all the four groups of people originated from the same flesh, there are no hierarchical differences. All groups originated from parts of the body that are divine and thus there is no issue of pure and impure or purity and pollution in the name of caste. The diversity of all creatures—humans, plants, and animals—originated from the same substance, indicating their ultimate unity within the diversity of God’s creation. The heterogeneous creation concept highlights differences in creatures created by Brahma, but rejects hierarchical social structures in which one group dominates and oppresses another. Different people with different skills are necessary for the smooth functioning of society. But superiority or inferiority is not the purpose here; every human being must be given equal respect irrespective of his or her occupation. Occupational skills should not be designated in terms of caste. The idea is that all varnas are contained in every individual instead of every individual being comprised within one of the four varnas; no one should be humiliated at any cost because everyone is created from the same Brahma (same substance). Furthermore, the anthropomorphic account of Purusa-Sukta exposes God in human form and God sacrificing His own body to create the human and natural world. It is thus a creation story of love and peace. Through the
sacrificial love of Brahma, the whole world and humanity was formed. This narration proclaims a message of peace between diverse creatures and humankind created from the “same substance” of Brahman.

In sum, our re-reading of the Genesis and Purusa-Sukta creation stories has undermined the traditional understanding of them as sanctioning hierarchical structures. Creation means differences, plurality in creatures, and diversity in skills or tasks assigned to the creatures. But no one is inferior or superior to another because all are created by God and from God. Even God is not superior since he is co-creator (Gen. 2–3) and sacrificially offers his own body (Purusa-Sukta). The created order demands the plurality of creatures with interdependence; it requires participation without dominance or hierarchical structures for peaceful coexistence. Thus discrimination in the name of gender, caste, class, or any such form is against the created order.


A liberative re-reading of the Genesis and Purusa-Sukta creation account also in addition emphasizes a nexus between God – human – nature and this nexus highlights diversity as the beauty of creation and not dominance between creatures.

8.1 God and Creation equal?
Both the creation narratives (Genesis and Purusa-Sukta), emphasize, God’s creative activity and the creatures dependence upon God. Both emphasize God as the source of all creation. On the other hand, the re-reading claims that created beings are entrusted with the responsibilities such as in the process of production, preserving the creation and so on. God’s creative power and the creatures’ role in sustaining the creation are two sides of the same coin called “Creation.” So God and the created things are equal in the sight of God. God shares His creative power with His creation. The Hindu narrative –Purusa-Sukta also affirms the same because all the creatures including human beings originated from the same God Brahma, God’s anthropomorphic nature in creation affirms His sharing of the divine aspect with human beings and the rest of the creation. It is not a mere question of whether God and creation are equal, but God’s sharing of His divinity with the creation is the crux of creation.
8.2 Destruction of Hierarchical power structure and implementation of equality

The hierarchical structure is not instituted by God but it is a human made structure. Hierarchical structural divisions can be seen both in the Genesis as well as in the Purusa-Sukta creation accounts in the name of gender, caste, class, or race and so on. Both the narratives in one form or other have been used to implement hierarchical structure between God-human and nature and also between man and woman and even between human beings in the name of caste. But the re-reading destructs this hierarchical power structure and it ultimately creates a space for equality. God proposes equality and destructs hierarchical structure which distorts the created order. The purpose of creation is to unite the diversity of creation under one umbrella with their differences. This implementation of equality over the whole creation emphasizes acceptance of one another with their differences. Sustenance of well being in the society will be possible with the co-operation of all creatures in this world.

8.3 Not Dependent but Inter-dependence

Both creation accounts (Genesis and Purusa-Sukta) describe the associations and interdependent relations between different realms of life. A homogeneous, mono-structured sphere is not yet creation.\textsuperscript{15} The different realms of life have to do with the relationship between human beings and vegetation, human beings and animals, also between different human communities.\textsuperscript{16} Peaceful and productive existence in the society is only possible with the co-operation of all creatures in this world. Thus creation accounts underscore the interdependence and peaceful co-existence of humankind and rest of the creation. Inter-dependence does not mean ‘dependence’ which many lead one to overrule the other. It is not woman depending on man, or it is not a lower caste person depending on the ‘so-called’ higher caste person. Irrespective of the caste and gender difference, interdependence is a concept of enabling one another and treating each other equally and it is purpose of creation.


\textsuperscript{16} John Skinner, \textit{A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), xxxiii.
8.4 Plurality and not Monopoly

Plurality is one of the special aspects of God's creation. Plurality proposes variety in God's creation. God is omnipotent, but does not claim to be superior; all that God created was recognized by God as good and beautiful. If the entire creation is similar there is no specialty in the creative work of God. But different kind of animals, vegetations, birds, sea monsters, heaven, earth, clouds, climate, sun, moon, stars, humans as male and female and what not, this variety of creation shows God's creative handy work. In Purusa-Sukta different groups of people emanating from different parts of the body of Brahma denotes variety or plurality of creation and different skills given to different persons in this world. This does not mean that one group should dominate and have monopoly over the other, but diversity of skills and tasks are needed for a peaceful sustenance of the society. Thus this model advocates acceptance of the plurality of God's creation. Plurality is to accept one another with differences or the richness and quality of the plural living beings and not to manipulate. Thus the creation accounts accentuate to recognize relations of interdependence between pluralities in different realms of life.

8.5 Participatory and not Dominancy

The traditional interpretation of creation accounts emphasize the connectedness and cooperation of creator and the creatures. God's creative action does not confront that which is created with completely finished facts. The creature's own activity as a constitutive element in the process of creation is seen in harmony with God's action. The creation account unmasks peculiar phenomena and relations of dependence as associations within the realm of the creaturely. This proposes participation among the whole creation in order to preserve each other and not to dominate. The re-reading from both the creation narratives (Genesis and Purusa-Sukta) emphasize the participation of the whole creation which is the created order. Participation of God, human, nature, participation of different groups irrespective of caste without dominating each other is one of the purposes of God creating the world and its components. Participation implies change and creation of a new and humane world order. Plurality in creation may have less importance and more important creatures; either has to participate in maintaining a good created order without dominance in order to form a nexus between God – human – nature.

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9. Concluding Remarks

A contrapuntal reading of Genesis and Purusa-Sukta creation narratives exposed how these accounts of creation have brought hierarchical or oppressive structures through centuries. Yet a liberative re-reading of the stories of creation (Genesis and Purusa-Sukta) has dismantled the traditional understanding of creation and domination of one another in the created order. Creation means differences, plurality in creatures, and diversity in skills or tasks assigned to the creatures. But no one is inferior to another, no one is superior to another because all are created by God and from God and even God does not show superiority since God is the creator. Created order demands the plurality of creatures with interdependence, participation without dominance, monopoly and hierarchical structures for peaceful co-existence. Thus, the contrapuntal reading enables us to understand the original voices of the texts as well as it enables us to observe the ‘outside’ voices which are the outcome of the hierarchical interpretations. Nevertheless, a liberative reading of the same texts can certainly enable to advocate equality and justice to the entire creation.
The Bible in Bob Marley’s music

JUAN ESTEBAN LONDOÑO

In this exposition, I want to read in a postcolonial-theologically way Bob Marley’s use of the Bible. It does an interreligious reading, which wants to learn to see God in the Other and to understand the Bible as a Book, which also belongs to other religions and not only to Christianity.

In my exposition, I present firstly the background of the Rastafari Movement as an early postcolonial artistic response to domination and as a way to build new identities against colonialism. Secondly, I explore the free interpretation of the Bible which Bob Marley does in his music. And thirdly, I discuss Marley’s interpretation from the perspective of the interreligious dialog and its implications for a postcolonial construction of identities.

1. Rastafari Movement

Since its foundation in the decade of the 1930s, the Rastafari Movement has grown to become the most influential cultural and political force in Jamaica. As a way of living, it has challenged the neocolonial Jamaican society, which aims to keep the White people in power and the Black as slaves (Toynbee, 2007).

The Rastafari Movement arises in Jamaica under the British colony. It is about a way of living of thinking of anticolonial dynamic identity, which looks for a connection with its own roots and preaches the return to Africa (Barsch, 2013, p. 11). It keeps many Jewish and Christian influences, especially in the recurrence to the Bible.

In the beginning, the Jamaican Rastas formed communities that pacifically resisted the British colony. They moved to the countryside and cultivated the land to feed themselves; they developed rituals like smoking marijuana and playing the drums to express their spirituality. They also let their hair grow in the dreadlocks style as a symbol of resistance against the canons of Eurocentric beauty (Barsch, 2003, pp. 17 y 105). But their communes and estates were destroyed by the White people, and as a result
the Rastas moved to the poor towns in Kingston. The state and the police did not have good relationships with the Rastas because they saw them as a dangerous movement of anarchy. Many Rastas were persecuted and even murdered by the police (Barsch, p. 20). Nonetheless, they were consolidating as Jamaican Black Power.

They adopted the Bible as their holy book, and identified themselves as the people of Israel and the primitive Church (Barsch, 2003, p. 16). In the Emperor of Ethiopia, Ras Tafari Makonen or Haile Selassie, they saw a savior who could fulfill their dream of bringing back the liberated slaves in the Americas to Africa. At the end, the Rastas believed that Selassie was a prophet, and finally a God.

The Rastafari Movement is not a centralized movement. It does not have a theological unity of doctrines. Many Rastas believe that Haile Selassie is a divine being; others focus their spirituality in the discipleship and following of Jesus Christ and believe that the historical figure of Selassie is not relevant for the Movement (Barsch, 2013, p. 25). Some are organized in religious groups, such as the Twelve Tribes of Israel, Bobo Dreads, or the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia (with a Rasta orientation), and some others distance themselves from organized religious systems and live their spirituality in solitude or in small communities. Like Barsch states, the Rastafari Movement can be defined as a new religious movement, distinct from organized movements who are more concentrated in dogmas, and develops living ways of socio-religious interactions. It takes elements from various traditions –like African cultures, Judaism and Christianity-, and reinterprets those elements in the light of new social and cultural experiences (Barsch, 2003, p. 31).

In the 1970s, the Rastafari Movement acquired international recognition thanks to Rastafarians who were famous painters, poets and musicians. The best known being the musician Bob Marley, who was accepted in Europe and North-America as a Black rock star from the third world (Abel, 1997; Barsch, 2003, p. 23) –and we must say, that he lived many times the excesses of superstars-. But, Bob Marley’s biggest contribution is the message in his music of liberation and respect for the forgotten cultures and countries.
2. **Bob Marley’s use of the Bible**

Now, I would like to analyze and present the way in which Bob Marley uses the Bible in a post-colonial way. There are several songs in which he quotes from the Bible in his Rasta interpretation. But, I chose, only two songs for this exposition: Get up Stand Up and Exodus.

2.1 **Get Up, Stand Up (Burnin’, 1973)**

The album Burnin’ from the year 1973 opens with this song, which goes beyond the traditional Caribbean songs of rocksteady and starts to incorporate the blues. The three formed Wailers Bob Marley, Bunny Livingstone and Peter Tosh sing this song protesting against the beliefs of the slave masters and the racism of the White people, and invite their Black people to stand for their rights:

*Get up, stand up: stand up for your rights!*
*Get up, stand up: don’t give up the fight!*

*Preacher man, don’t tell me,*
*Heaven is under the earth.*
*I know you don’t know*
*What life is really worth.*
*It’s not all that glitters is gold;*
*Half the story has never been told:*
*So now you see the light, eh!*
*Stand up for your rights. Come on!*

*Most people think,*
*Great god will come from the skies,*
*Take away everything*
*And make everybody feel high.*
*But if you know what life is worth,*
*You will look for yours on earth:*
*And now you see the light,*
*You stand up for your rights. Jah!*

*We sick an’ tired of-a your ism-skism game -*
*Dyin’ ‘n’ goin’ to heaven in-a Jesus’ name, lord.*
*We know when we understand:*
*Almighty god is a living man.*
*You can fool some people sometimes,*
*But you can’t fool all the people all the time.*
*So now we see the light (what you gonna do?)*,
*We gonna stand up for our rights!*


The voice of Marley criticizes the White preacher, who asks conformity only from the Black people. Marley says a justification of slavery and colonialism in the promises of salvation in a future life, while the people work for the wealth of others. In this way, Marley criticizes also the God of the White people, who will come from the sky, while the Black people are oppressed by the White colonials.

Later in the song comes the voice of Peter Tosh, who is even more radical and provocative than Marley and sings against the false image of Jesus, like a gentle man, who permits every abuse in the name of a future. Tosh warns against such image of the colonialists, who sustain a pietistic eschatology, and it is only about the justification of the wealth of the White people over the Black people.

In this song we find two views of the divine. The first one is the God of the White people. He is the White God who legitimizes the lordship of the White people. The other is the God of the people who look for liberation and respect. This is the Black God who in the view of the Rastas is the only true God. It is no different from the perspective of the Liberation theology, which establishes a difference between the true God and the false Gods, the Idols. And this difference lies in the fact that the false Gods justify slavery, colonialism and oppression, but the true God –whichever is his name– wants liberation and equality.

For the Rastas, the true image of the liberator God was Haile Selassie. We must also say that Selassie did not help so much the Rastafari Movement. Even Marcus Garvey called Selassie a coward who was only in service of the British crown (Barsch, 2003, p. 54). But, as a symbol of this movement –like many Gods are usually only symbols of things that transcend them– he serves as Black God, with whom people can identify.

In this song, to call Haile Selassie, the living man, a God, means a symbolic challenge to the English colonial control of Jamaica. The Rastas did not recognize anymore White people as Lords, neither the Queen of England, nor the White God of the colonial Christians. Now, they have their own symbol for the divine power on earth: A God of human flesh, Black flesh like theirs.
2.2. Exodus (Exodus, 1977)

Exodus is the central song of the album of 1977 with the same name. This song is similar to a jam-session with epic style in the lyrics. It is an invitation, but also a prayer to God for an Exodus. Here, the rhythm accompanies the biblical words of the song and invites to dance and march:

*Men and people will fight ya down
When ya see Jah light
Let me tell you if you’re not wrong
Well, everything is all right
So we gonna walk
Through the roads of creation
We the generation
Tread through great tribulation
In this exodus
Good god almighty
Movement of Jah people
Exodus
The movement of Jah people
Oh, well, well, well
Open your heart, uh!
And look within
Are you satisfied
With the life you’re living?
We know where we’re going
We know where we’re from
We’re leaving Babylon
We’re going to the Father’s land
In this exodus
Movement of Jah people
Exodus
The movement of Jah people

(Jah come to break down pressure
Rule equality, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah
Wipe away transgression
Set the captives free.

The Exodus is a biblical symbol the Rastas use to refer to going back to Africa. They leave behind slavery, racism and colonialism and go to a better place. The Rastas call this place Babylon because it is a system of injustice.
As we know, Babylon was the Empire which brought the people of Israel as slaves. And the Rastas reread the Bible and identify themselves as the African descendants of the exiled people. They are the new children of God in the middle of Babylon. They resist the strategies of the Empire to convert them, such as the prophet Daniel who denied to eat the food of the king –most of the Rastas are vegetarians, and they do not want to eat the food of Babylon-. Far from what many people think, for the Rastas Jamaica is not the salvation because it belongs also to the Babylon System, meanwhile it is governed by corruption (Barsch, 2003, p. 10).

In the first years of their Movement, the Rastas believed that the salvation was in Africa, as Bob Marley states in this song. But now, they know that in Africa there is also the same corruption than in Jamaica and in the western countries, and they start to believe that Babylon is spiritual and Zion is also spiritual.

Babylon has a racial, social, political and spiritual dimension (Barsch, 2003, p. 58). It shows the feeling of living in exile and the oppression which receive the system over the exiled. Even in the Rastafari Movement, we can find a tendency to the discourse of Black supremacy, the concept of Babylon is not simply a color, but every way of organized oppression through the State and the Church to deny the freedom of living and believing.

In opposition to Babylon, the Rastas speak about Zion. The Rastafarian hermeneutics translate this spiritual place from Palestine to Africa -but Africa as a spiritual place of the roots-. In the beginning, the Rastas idealized Ethiopia as the sacred place of salvation and destiny of the exodus – even most of the slaves came to the Americas not from East Africa but from West Africa-. Now, Zion serves as a utopic referent, the positive counterpart to the negativity of Babylon.

As we can see in this song, Bob Marley uses the Bible with a very free alternative hermeneutics. The rule of his interpretation and the interpretation of the Rastafarians is the freedom of the oppressed people. As he says in an interview in Switzerland:

The Bible is used to be loved. Because the Bible is the recall of man creation. It is the only book which can show you how mankind began, without prejudices, without bosses, pride guy, anything, all is about our God. That’s
it. Well, all Christians... and not even the Christians, all people go to church interpret the Bible as the preachers teach them. That is not the right way. Because the best thing is the life. See? Life. Life to deal it. The preachers read the Bible and say we have to die to go to heaven. But it is not written in the Bible. Because the Bible says: you have to live in the heaven. You know? You don't have to die, you have to live... in heaven. And a couple of places on earth could be. But Africa is our heaven. Because is where we come from (Marley, 1980).

3. Theological implications: an interreligious dialog

When we hear Bob Marley's interpretation of the Bible, we can only approach it from an interreligious perspective. The interreligious dialogue is a way of the interreligious Exchange, in which people from different religions want to dive deep in their own faith as well as the faith of the other. As a theologian, my purpose is not to correct the Interpretation of Marley by using the historical-critical methods of the Bible, but I can learn to know the Mystery through the eyes of another.

From the perspective of interreligious dialogue, I see God as the Mystery (Knitter, 2002). Religions have interpreted this Mystery from their specific socio-historical location, and I understand and accept it as an expression of the spirituality of people who are searching for liberation.

I would even dare to say that Bob Marley's music and interpretation of the Bible is a Liberation Theology contemporary to the Liberation Theology of the 1970's in Latin America. Beyond that, it is also a postcolonial popular theology, which is looking to build an identity against the colonial imposition of identities.

Bob Marley is not a scholar and his interpretation of the Bible is far away from our sophisticated ways of translating, criticizing and applying the biblical texts in our communities. But in his artistic interpretation, he has the capacity to use the Word of God to denounce social and personal sins. He announces expectation and a new Kingdom of the Spirit.

Marley not only goes beyond the classical interpretations of Christianity, but also the interpretations of the Rastafari Movement because he uses the Bible not in connection with dogmas, but with the arts. He sees that the
Symbols in the Bible are his own symbols and also the Symbols of his community. Music and the arts are ways to conserve these symbols deep in the multiplicity of senses, which the Bible as a written text offers to us. Marley and the Rastas can read their own history near to the crucified Jesus and to the Black God, and in this interpretation they want to participate in the resurrection and build a new world of justice and peace.

The Rastas feel close to Jesus and his original movement- an underground and alternative movement-, and they combine this way of following Jesus with their African traditions and roots. Because of that, the Rastas narrate the biblical history as a mirror, in which they read their own history and experiences.

Rastafari people speak about God from the language which they are taught to speak from childhood or learn along the way: the Black God, who gives people a new identity, the God of liberation and Exodus, the God of hope. Rastafari have found a lot of stories, rites, symbols, ethics and system of thinking which give them the capacity of organizing the world in well-known categories. And this is for them a very valid postcolonial interpretation of the Bible.

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Postcolonial biblical hermeneutics and exegesis

WERNER KAHL

1. Introduction

Musa W. Dube from Botswana is one of the most influential representatives of post-colonial biblical hermeneutics. She prefaced one of her first contributions on the topic with a saying that is widespread in southern Africa: “When the white man came to our country, he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said: ‘Let us pray’. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible.”

The popular saying succinctly recalls the experience of the colonisation of southern Africa from the perspective of dark-skinned Africans who had lost their land to the light-skinned, self-proclaimed colonial masters from Western Europe. According to this interpretation, the loss of the land is attributed to a religiously staged deceptive manoeuvre. In return, the inhabitants of the country received the Bible without being asked.

This short narrative about a complex historical development provides an example of the significance of the Bible in the context of colonial history in the modern age: It was used in various ways to generate an increase in power and significance on the part of the colonial powers, accompanied by a disempowerment of the colonised.

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1 This article is a translation of my originally German version which appeared recently in *Zeitschrift für Neues Testament* 26/52 (2024), 5-27: “Postkoloniale Bibelhermeneutik und Exegese.” I included minor changes.

Musa W. Dube, Reading for Decolonisation (John 4:1-42), in: Laura E. Donaldson (ed.), Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading (Semeia 75), Atlanta 1996, 37-60, here: 37; cf. also Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, St. Louis 2000, 3. The story reflected by the saying, however, is in and by itself not unproblematic. It insinuates a certain naivety on the part of Africans and thus reproduces paternalistic clichés. I recall a lecture by Archbishop Desmond Tutu who used to serve as visiting professor at Emory University in the 1980s and 1990s. Obviously aware of its inherent problematic, he reframed the story, which he narrated with the addition of the following remark: “And do you know what? We have got the better deal!”
An important strand of post-colonial biblical hermeneutics is concerned with shedding light on this history of entanglement between colonialist aggression and the Bible, which – from this perspective – has historically functioned as an “imperial text”. ¹ This is true in two respects: Representatives of colonial powers and, in particular, missionaries felt that their readings of certain biblical passages from the 18th to the 20th century called them to “civilise” and “Christianise” people in distant regions of Africa, Asia and Oceania – ostensibly for their benefit. ² In this respect, these Bible readings acted as a motivating force behind the colonialist project. In addition, the Bible translations into indigenous languages of Asia, Oceania and Africa, that were produced at the initiative of missionaries, and the creation of dictionaries as part of the process of reducing to writing languages that had previously only been practised orally, also represented attempts to discredit traditional cultures and their religiosity, particularly through the demonisation of ancestral spirits and gods. ³

One branch of postcolonial hermeneutics research that is widespread in the Pacific region and sub-Saharan Africa is dedicated to the critical re-reading of Bible translations produced during the colonial era, accompanied by projects for culturally sensitive retranslations of biblical writings into local languages. In this regard, mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics draws on local encyclopaedias – languages, cultures and traditions – as resources for an appropriate translation of the Bible. ⁴ This applies both with regard to the conceptualisation of what is meant in New Testament texts and with regard to its current communication within certain reading communities. Due to experiences of colonialism with regard to the imperial use of the Bible for the domination and cultural degradation of indigenous populations in the Global South, a number of postcolonial exegetes have undertaken a critical examination of biblical writings themselves to determine the extent to which imperial structures are positively conveyed

in them, or corresponding attitudes are adopted and colonialist instructions for action are recommended – whether as conscious strategies or as unconscious imitations of existing power structures (mimicry). On the other hand, the Bible can also be read and recognised for its potential for resistance from a postcolonial perspective. In fact, recent postcolonial studies increasingly register the presence of both system-stabilising and subversive tendencies in New Testament writings.

In addition to the history of the Bible’s impact in colonialist contexts and a re-reading of biblical writings that is critical of colonialism, the third main field of postcolonial criticism is the critical analysis of traditional historical-critical exegesis as it has developed and established itself in the West since the end of the 18th century. In German-language biblical studies in particular, which was recognised worldwide in the 19th and 20th centuries as a yardstick for biblical exegesis, it was widely taken for granted until the end of the last century that exegetical methodology and its hermeneutical underpinnings had the aura of universal validity. Such a rather robust self-image was – and is – boosted by ignoring critical reflection on one’s own theological and cultural position and interests on the one hand and by ignoring academic and popular interpretations of the Bible in other regions of the world, especially the Global South, on the other. Due to the history of Western domination of their countries and the discrediting of traditional cultures, postcolonial exegetes from the Global South usually have a pronounced sensitivity for claims to interpretative power, as they have prevailed in Western exegesis for a long time and as they can still be encountered today. In particular, the diachronically orientated methodological steps of historical-critical exegesis, with its interest in the reconstruction of an original text, the ascertaining of an author’s intention and the establishment of one correct interpretation based on supposedly universally valid theological truths, can appear suspect. Such an exegetical approach and attitude evokes memories of the colonialist project of mastering spatially (or temporally) distant (textual) bodies. From a postcolonial perspective, however, this similarity is no coincidence. The emergence, development and implementation of historical-critical exege-

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ysis coincided precisely with the period of colonialism from the 18th to the 20th century. Even if the German Empire itself only appeared as a colonial power for a relatively short period of time (1884-1918/9), albeit with a long history of involvement of German actors as traders (including slave traders), mercenaries and missionaries in often exploitative relationships with distant countries, dating back to the 16th century, it is also a reflection of the German Empire’s role as a colonial power. In this way, philosophical movements of thought, philological initiatives and anthropological studies by German-speaking scholars, especially in the 19th century, reflect the attitude of an enormous sense of superiority in relation to people in distant regions of the world who were constructed as “the completely other” and who would have fallen far behind northern Europeans in terms of intellectual history and civilisation, becoming objects of Western research interests.

In this respect, postcolonial exegetes from the Global South can accuse such Western exegesis of complicity with both the colonialist project of the past and neo-colonialism of the present. Publications by Western exegetes are subjected to a postcolonial hermeneutics of suspicion. They are seen as an expression of a Eurocentrism that continues to be unreflectedly passed on in biblical studies. Postcolonial exegetes reject the claim to interpretative power that is encountered here.

In addition, traditional Western exegesis with its research concerns and methods of analysis, including its theological and philosophical preconceptions, is widely regarded as irrelevant to contexts in the Global South. It has been recognised that Western exegesis owes its existence to a particular history and encyclopaedia. In this respect, Western exegesis is also a version of contextual exegesis, even if this was or is rarely recognised by its representatives, especially in the past, but also in the present. From a postcolonial perspective, it can appear as a suspect representative or even

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7 On the racist constructions of Africans in Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel as well as on the widespread corresponding attitudes of German-speaking missionaries, see Werner Kahl, Jesus als Lebensretter (see note 3), 27-33. On the interweaving of colonialism, orientalism, theology and biblical studies in the 19th century, see Suzanne Marchand, German Orientalism in the Age of Empire. Religion, Race, and Scholarship, Cambridge 2009; Simon Wiesigckl, Das Alte Testament als deutsche Kolonie. Die Neuerfindung des Alten Testaments um 1800 (BWANT 214), Stuttgart 2018; Runesson, Exegesis (see note 2), 67-71.
agent of Western power of domination and interpretation in the field of biblical exegesis, which ignores or excludes the voices of the non-privileged at the margins of the spheres of power – be it in relation to biblical writings, be it in relation to exegeses from the Global South, be it in relation to the needs and requirements of people who suffer from contemporary neo-colonialism.

Some prominent exegeses who have dedicated themselves to the postcolonial discourse share a political interest in changing local social and global economic structures in order to promote justice for those dependent on and left behind by the West, whether at the so-called margins of power in the Global South or within the so-called centres of power. From the perspective of some postcolonial exegeses, this kind of socio-critical interest aimed at change can be identified as the noblest function of a postcolonial and therefore “ethical” biblical hermeneutics.8

In this respect, postcolonial hermeneutics is not a historically backward-looking endeavour, but a committed and partisan programme with the aim of shaping the present and the future. Some of its representatives localise themselves in an alleged struggle of “their” respective people for economic justice and dignity. They do this with the awareness that colonial history did not come to an end with the independence of formerly colonised countries from around the middle of the 20th century, and that is continues to have an effect, particularly in the form of neo-colonialism. The prefix “post” in post-colonialism signals a critical reflection and questioning of power constellations from the perspective of the colonised – formerly and in various ways also currently dominated by the West – with the aim of changing power relations in the present, including exegetical ones.9

While classical liberation theology of the 1960s to 1980s with its corresponding hermeneutics primarily referred to localised regions – such as Latin American countries or South Africa – postcolonial biblical hermeneutics since the 1990s has also focused on global power relations and injustices, as they were taken and perpetrated by the “West”, i.e. ulti-

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mately by “white” men and women, theologically justified and exegetically
underpinned. In a way, liberation theology lives on in a global perspective
in post-colonial biblical hermeneutics and theology. This is also true with
regard to the political ideology of anti-imperialism in the Marxist tradi-
tion, as it is more or less openly advocated by a number of prominent repre-
sentatives of postcolonial hermeneutics, who, interestingly, live, work
and operate primarily at prestigious “Western universities” or in the “cen-
tres of power”.10

Overall, however, it is not adequate to speak of a single postcolonial bib-
lical hermeneutics. As explained above, the postcolonial field of research
is highly differentiated, depending on the interest, the methodology used,
the focus and the localisation of the exegetes involved. The spectrum of
postcolonial biblical hermeneutics encompasses the following fields of
work and positionings:

1. History of the impact of the Bible in colonialist contexts
   1.1 Justification of the colonialist project
   1.2 Bible translations
2. Re-readings of biblical writings critical of colonialism
   2.1 Biblical writings as anti-colonialist, anti-imperial
       literature and/or
   2.2 Biblical writings as colonialist, imperial literature
3. Defining the relationship to the historical-critical exegesis
   of the West”
   3.1 Application from a postcolonial perspective
   3.2 Rejection, as irrelevant or harmful as part of the
       colonialist project
4. Ethnic cultures and traditional methods as resources for
   interpreting the Bible
5. Ethics of biblical interpretation
5.1 Giving a voice to the unheard, in the Bible, history and the present,
    especially in the Global South, on an academic and popular level
5.2 Political agenda for world change towards the realisation
    of global, especially economic, justice

10 Cf. the careful presentation and critical discussion by Niall McKay, Materialist/Marxist Interpre-
The famous names of the main representatives of postcolonial hermeneutics (R. S. Sugirtharajah, Fernando F. Segovia, Kwok Pui-lan, Musa W. Dube who are characterised by a certain political radicalism and who have shaped and dominated the international discourse in this regard due to the numerous publications they are responsible for in renowned publishing houses in the West) should not, however, obscure the fact that they do not represent postcolonial exegesis as it is currently practised in the Global South.

The vast majority of exegetes living in Asian, sub-Saharan and Pacific countries interpret the Bible differently due to specific problem situations and faith traditions, often also claiming to practice postcolonial exegesis. Many of these exegetes, who are academically trained to doctoral level, have been sent by their churches to theological training centres or universities to serve as lecturers. Even as academic teachers, they remain committed to the church and their local faith communities. They generally share a high regard for the Bible as Holy Scripture with their parishioners. The methodological steps, questions and hermeneutical assumptions of classical, diachronically orientated historical-critical exegesis appear to be just as irrelevant here as the reading of the Bible under the postcolonial hermeneutics of a radical suspicion of involvement in colonialist contexts. From this perspective, the following concerns are pursued in particular:

1. Synchronously orientated exegeses to illuminate the resistance potential of biblical narratives and positioning vis-à-vis colonialist oppression and injustice, for example in antiquity.

2. Rediscovering the cultural richness of the ethnic group considered to be one’s own – in the inner perspective in English: “tribe” – and strengthening resistance to colonialist domination. From the perspective of ethnic, largely Christian minorities in north-east Indian states – e.g. Nagaland or Mizoram – neither the former colonial power Great Britain nor “the West” is identified as the “empire” to be shaken off in this respect, but rather Hindu India.12

12 See, for example, the contributions by Indian exegetes to the Gospel of Mark and Luke, which appeared recently in the anthology Tribal Hermeneutics. Biblical Reflections from North East India, B. Lalnunzira/A. Abeni Patton (eds.), Aizawl/Delhi 2023: Lalmuanpuii Hmar, Jesus’ Con-
3. Critical review and revision of the existing Bible translations into indigenous languages produced on the initiative of Western missionaries.  

2. The emergence of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics and exegesis

The emergence of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics and exegesis must be embedded in other contexts such as globalisation, migration and, in particular, related developments in literary studies. From the 1970s onwards, English departments at universities in the USA and the UK began to reflect on novels of the colonial and post-colonial era as part of colonial studies. From around the mid-1950s, literature written by natives in British colonies that had just come to an end or were coming to an end had emerged that represented counter-narratives to European constructions of life in the colonies, particularly as disseminated in European novels of the first half of that century. While the latter were associated with the clear tendency of Western arrogance and prejudice towards people in India, in African or Arab countries, who were either presented as uncivilised, dishonest, childish and lustful or romantically glorified, literary voices from the colonies were now coming forward, focusing on natives as complex subjects who were faced with the task of having to find their way in a world in which traditional values and structures had been permanently shaken as a result of colonialism. Other authors dealt theoretically with the effects of colonialism, for example on the psyche of the people in the colonial territories.

The emergence of the general postcolonial discourse at universities in the Anglophone West presupposed the mobility of students from the Global South. All three of the academics who provided the decisive impetus for the development of postcolonial discourse in the last quarter of the 20th century were part of the Long Front of Empire in Mark’s Gospel and its Significance for Mizo Society, 143-151; Kennedy Poumai, Postcolonial Reading of Luke’s Gospel and Its Importance for Our Church, 165-174.  

13 Cf. as examples the following two postcolonial contributions by exegetes from Samoa: Mosese Ma’ilo, Bible-ing my Samoan, Apia, Samoa 2016; Apineru Tavita, Sufiga o le va in Romans 13:1-7. A Samoan perspective of postcolonial theory (A Thesis Presented to The Faculty of Piula Theological College, Samoa, in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Theology), Piula, Samoa in May 2022.
14 Nadella, Rise (see note 10), 704-717.
15 Nadella, Rise (see note 10), 706-708.
century were literary scholars who were educated and taught in the West and who came from – former – British colonial territories: Edward Said (born in Palestine), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha (both born in India).\textsuperscript{18} Drawing primarily on post-structuralist and post-modern Western theorists such as Michel Foucault (Said: discourses of power), Jacques Derrida (Spivak: deconstructivism with a feminist twist) and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (Bhabha: mimicry, hybridity, ambivalence, third spaces),\textsuperscript{19} they developed theories that aimed to “criticise discourses, strategies and the colonial legacy. In doing so, they incorporated impulses from the political and literary stages of post-colonialism as well as feminism and race theory.”\textsuperscript{20}

Overall, these authors draw attention to the fact that people and ethnic groups in large regions of the world have been marginalised, i.e. rendered insignificant, by the colonial project of the West, and how they react to this. This power relationship is analysed in a discourse-critical manner: The focus here is therefore on the complexity of any production of knowledge about the ‘others’, questions of colonial and postcolonial representation and, in the case of Orientalism, the Western projection of ideas about the Orient for the purpose of establishing a hegemonic European discourse of domination.\textsuperscript{21}

Now, the Bible is also literature, and one that has had a significant hegemonic function in colonial history. In this respect, it is anything but a coincidence that it was initially \textit{exegetes} within theology who took up the impulses of postcolonial theorists. Also the initiators of a postcolonial hermeneutics hailed from former British colonies. They also received their highest academic degree in the West and they were employed by prestigious academic institutions in the UK or the USA:

R. S. Sugirtharajah was born in Sri Lanka and most recently taught at the University of Birmingham in England; Musa W. Dube hails from Botswana, where she taught at the state university for many years until she

\textsuperscript{18} Cf. the excellent presentation and critical discussion of the drafts of these three theorists of postcolonial discourse in: María do Mar Castro Varela/Nikita Dhawan (eds.), Postcolonial Theory. A critical introduction. Bielefeld\textsuperscript{4} 2020.
\textsuperscript{19} Nadella, Rise (see note 10), 709f.
\textsuperscript{20} Nadella, Rise (see note 10), 706f.
\textsuperscript{21} Doris Bachmann-Medick, Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften, Reinbek bei Hamburg\textsuperscript{4} 2010, 188.
moved to Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia; Kwok Pui-lan grew up in Hong Kong and also took up a teaching position at Emory University, after teaching at other US-American universities.\textsuperscript{22}

In this respect, the development of postcolonial theory in general and postcolonial biblical hermeneutics in particular are \textit{diaspora phenomena}. The theorems developed and exegetically applied here, such as hybridity, mimicry, representation and third spaces, also reflect the biographical ruptures and experiences of these exegetes due to their diasporic existence.

In the following, I will present selected programmatic contributions by the three main representatives of postcolonial hermeneutics from the early years.

R. S. Sugirtharajah's 1991 publication of the anthology \textit{Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World}\textsuperscript{23} was the first to call for a reorientation within the exegetical study of the Bible, which overlaps in content with the contemporary postcolonial discourse in literary studies, albeit without yet presenting an elaborated and explicitly named postcolonial hermeneutics. The distinction between the centre of power and its margins, both in antiquity and in the present, is a prerequisite. The anthology represents an attempt to “decentralise the centre by questioning its interpretative agendas, concerns and epistemological assumptions, as promoted above all by historical-critical methods.”\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{22} Other exegetes such as the New Testament scholar Fernando F. Segovia, originally from Cuba and teaching at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, should also be mentioned in this context. However, what distinguishes Segovia from the three aforementioned exegetes in academic terms is that, unlike Kwok Pui-lan, Sugirtharajah and Dube, he has also focused on researching, teaching and publishing beyond an \textit{explicit} postcolonial programme, particularly in the field of classical liberation theology and intercultural hermeneutics, cf. for example Fernando F. Segovia, Intercultural Bible Reading and Liberation in the Steps of Dom Hélder Câmara, in: Daniel S. Schipani/Martien Brinkmann/Hans Snoek (eds.), New Perspectives on Intercultural Reading of the Bible (FS Hans de Wit), Elkhart 2015, 7-37; ibid, Intercultural Bible Reading as Transformation for Liberation. Intercultural Hermeneutics and Biblical Studies, in: Hans de Wit/Janet Dyk (eds.), Bible and Transformation. The Promise of Intercultural Bible Reading, Atlanta 2015, 19-51.

\textsuperscript{23} New York.

\textsuperscript{24} Nadella, Rise (see note 10), 714.
In his introduction to the volume and in a postscript, Sugirtharajah provides information about the programme he initiated for a reorientation of exegesis.\textsuperscript{25} Following on from Latin American liberation theology and its interpretations of the Bible,\textsuperscript{26} the view is now broadened to include the perspectives of the oppressed throughout the – then so-called – Third World and within the centres of power (African-Americans, Native-Americans). The voices of those who are discriminated against on the basis of class, “race” or gender are to be made audible in the global chorus around the interpretation of the Bible, namely – derived from the Gospel – as privileged voices.\textsuperscript{27} A key aim of this project is to overcome the marginalisation of exegetical voices from the Global South in “mainline biblical scholarship”, which has been dominated by “male Euro-American scholars” to date.\textsuperscript{28} Historical-critical exegesis with its methodology, its claim to neutrality, its individualistic orientation and theological abstraction should be replaced by consciously contextualised approaches to the Bible. Only by referring to concrete life contexts does biblical exegesis make sense.

The alternative to the prevailing historical-critical paradigm described by Sugirtharajah as “hermeneutics of the marginalised” is characterised by the following features:

1. A repossession of the Bible by the “ordinary” believers (“ordinary people”).

2. Solidarity and performative interpretations in order to bridge the so-called hermeneutical gap, i.e. on the one hand the historical distance between biblical texts in their contexts and contemporary reading contexts, and on the other hand to overcome the division of labour between exegetes and pastors (“the greatest sin of historical-critical exegesis”).\textsuperscript{29} Exegetes are also called upon to show solidarity and to participate or take sides in the liberation struggle of marginalised population groups, whether in relation to biblical or contemporary con-

\begin{footnotes}
\item[27] Sugirtharajah, Postscript (see note 25), 434: „Giving a voice to the voiceless.“
\item[28] Sugirtharajah, Introduction (see note 25), 1f.
\item[29] Sugirtharajah, Postscript (see note 25), 436.
\end{footnotes}
texts. Biblical hermeneutics is thus linked – in the tradition of Latin American liberation theology – with a decidedly socially transformative function. Sugirtharajah justifies this claim in a decidedly biblical-theological way by referring to the gospel narrative: “The biblical concept of resurrection [probably referring to the ressurrection of Jesus from the dead, W. K.] only becomes clear when new hope and love are brought to people who have neither hope nor love. Jesus’ proclamation of God’s reign is only realised when the ideals of the kingdom of God – love, justice and mercy – are practised.” 30

3. The underprivileged are the hermeneutical focus.

4. A productive fusion of liberation engagement and academic exegesis: Euro-American exegetes used historical-critical methods to “make biblical narratives meaningful to a secularised population that has become unsure of its faith.” 31 These methods should now be used for the purpose of liberating the marginalised. 32

5. The consideration and appreciation of the social locality of biblical interpretations while at the same time rejecting exegetical claims to proceed in a value-neutral manner. In a world divided into rich and poor, privileged and underprivileged, hermeneutical neutrality is an illusion that also cements the status quo.

6. It is about the commitment to a transformation of the world towards the realisation of justice.

In her 1998 article “Reflection on Women’s Sacred Scriptures”, the exegete Kwok Pui-lan identified the following main concerns of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics from an explicitly feminist perspective:

30 Sugirtharajah, Postcript (see note 25), 436. I have deliberately quoted this theological justification derived from the Gospel. In all too many postcolonial studies, especially those that are guided by a hermeneutics of suspicion, the method seems to have taken on a life of its own, without the positioning being theologically reflected or tied back to any kind of understanding of Gospel.

31 Sugirtharajah, Postcript (see note 25), 437.

32 This is therefore not yet a fundamental criticism of historical-critical methodology.
1. Challenging the claim to totality, objectivity and universality of Western exegesis.

2. Pursuing an anti-hegemonic discourse in exegesis by pursuing the strategy of tracking down hidden, hushed-up, overheard and anti-colonial voices in biblical texts and making them speak.

3. Interrelating biblical texts with non-biblical texts, traditions and contexts (intertextuality).

4. Promoting the participation of people on the margins of economic power centres in exegetical discourse: ethnic minorities, migrants and women in particular (intersectionality).

5. Orientation towards insights of post-structuralist literary theory and postmodern philosophy, in particular discourse-theoretical reflections on the relationship between power, language and theory.

These points largely coincide with the concerns listed by Sugirtharajah. Unlike Sugirtharajah, Kwok argues with terms and concepts that are indebted to the secular postmodern discourse in literary studies. At the same time, the liberation-theological impulse, which is of fundamental importance in Sugirtharajah’s explanations, recedes in favour of discourse-theoretical reflections.

In her highly acclaimed study *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* from 2000, the New Testament scholar Musa W. Dube deconstructed different readings of Mt 15:21-28 (“The Canaanite Woman”). Her sole criterion for analysing the biblical text and its interpretations is the question of whether they “promote and restore life in God's creation”. From the perspective of the particular experiences of colonialism in southern Africa and its effects, Dube is concerned with the decolonisation of Christianity, including its interpretation of the Bible. The selected biblical text serves her as a paradigm for uncovering the imperialist tendencies of both the Gospel of Matthew and its Western interpreters, including feminist exegetes.

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33 St. Louis, MO 2000.
34 Cf. the more detailed account and critique of the book in Kahl, Jesus als Lebensretter (see note 3), 95-100.
Her comparison of Mt 15:21-28 with 8:15-30 ("The centurion of Capernaum") suggests that the implied author of Matthew’s Gospel, writing in a situation of imperial occupation, may have challenged the religious leaders, competing with other groups for power and seeking to win the favour of the Roman Empire.\(^{35}\)

By favouring “journeys to distant and inhabited lands” for the purpose of missionary work in the Gospel of Matthew,\(^ {36}\) “the Matthean model represents an embodiment of imperialist values and strategies.”\(^ {37}\) This strategy of mimicry would, however, be overlooked by Western exegetes. “White, middle-class feminist readings of the West”\(^ {38}\) also remain bound to a cultural and economic imperialism that makes it impossible for them to grasp the power relations, negotiation processes and interests underlying the text passage. They thus participated in the hegemonic power of the West. What is at stake is the liberation of non-Western traditions from the captivity of economic power centres. As the Bible today belongs to the whole world and no longer just to the West,\(^ {39}\) a model of reading is needed that takes the presence of imperialism and patriarchalism seriously and is interested in a liberating interdependence “between genders, races, nations, economies, cultures, political structures, and so on”.\(^ {40}\)

Dube sees such a liberative reading model realised in the practice of African-independent churches in Botswana, because here power oppositions such as /man/ versus /woman/, /old/ versus /young/, /black/ versus /white/, /written/ versus /oral word/, /Christian salvation/ versus /African religiosiety/ were largely abolished. Each and every individual would be recognised here as a person who could participate in the divine spirit. As in traditional African religiosiety, church and theology are orientated towards preserving and promoting life. Human existence is perceived as a “liberating web of relationships”.\(^ {41}\) And according to Dube, this is precisely how the divine will is captured. The inclusivity of salvation assumed here is only concealed in the Bible; it is also only expressed in a fragmented form in the oral communications of women in African independ-

\[^{35}\] Dube, Postcolonial (see note 1), 182.
\[^{36}\] Dube, Postcolonial (see note 1), 154.
\[^{37}\] Dube, Postcolonial (see note 1), 155.
\[^{38}\] Dube, Postcolonial (see note 1), 182.
\[^{39}\] Dube, Postcolonial (see note 1), 39.
\[^{40}\] Dube, Postcolonial (see note 1), 39.
\[^{41}\] Dube, Postcolonial (see note 1), 186.
ent churches. Based on participant observations in those churches, Dube comes to the following conclusion:

“The communication of the meaning of the passage was inextricably interwoven with the acts of interpretation (…) communitarian interpretation, participatory interpretation through the use of songs, interpretation through dramatised narration and interpretation through repetition.”42

The prevailing method of biblical interpretation in the West, on the other hand, is strongly text- and logocentric. As such, it is declared irrelevant for African contexts.43

3. **Central publications of postcolonial hermeneutics and exegesis**

Exegetical publications under an explicitly postcolonial banner have been published since the mid-1990s, almost exclusively in English. In terms of content, they partly overlap with studies that are known as “cultural exegesis”, which in turn owes its methodology to the linguistic and cultural turns in literature and the humanities and which somewhat precedes the biblical hermeneutics that explicitly appears as postcolonial. Postcolonial hermeneutics and exegesis also strongly valorise cultural approaches to the Bible, for example in marginalised ethnic groups, and can recommend their use as intertextual methods and resources. It differs from studies of cultural exegesis in its terminology, which is characterised by postcolonial discourse, and its critical approach to imperialism, which often goes hand in hand with a fundamental, discourse-critical questioning of the methods and assumptions of Western exegesis and places the Bible itself under a hermeneutic of suspicion of involvement in colonialisit exploitation. Cultural exegesis, on the other hand, is largely characterised by the fact that it expands the spectrum of possible readings of the Bible to include perspectives previously ignored in the West, without denying the relative value of Western exegesis – for Western contexts.44

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42 Dube, Postcolonial (see note 1), 190.
43 Dube, Postcolonial (see note 1), 40.
The following is a list of particularly important publications in the field of postcolonial hermeneutics and exegesis from the mid-1990s to the present day. I provide them with brief explanations for orientation.

In 1996, two publications appeared that established the paradigm of a biblical hermeneutics explicitly labelled as postcolonial: Sugirtharajah published the article “From Orientalist to Post-Colonial: Notes on Reading Practices” in the *Asia Journal of Theology*, in which he “explicitly brought postcolonial criticism into dialogue with biblical interpretations.” As the title suggests, he drew on Edward Said’s critique of Orientalism. Sugirtharajah counters the ostensibly Western exegetical tendency to silence voices, texts and methods of biblical interpretation from the Global South with the postcolonially underpinned demand for an intertextual interrelation of Hindu and Christian texts as an exegetical method.

In the same year, the anthology *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading* was published in the *Semeia* series of the *Society of Biblical Literature*. It was edited by Laura E. Donaldson, who herself has an American-Indigenous background. From different local and cultural perspectives – Musa Dube from Botswana is also represented here with a contribution on John 4:1-42 – colonialist tendencies are traced both in biblical interpretations and in biblical texts themselves.

In 1998, a new book series was launched in which a whole series of important studies on postcolonial biblical hermeneutics and exegesis have been published over the years: *The Bible and Postcolonialism*. The first volume was entitled *The Postcolonial Bible* and was edited by Sugirtharajah. The contributions in this anthology analyse how colonialism was also promoted through biblical exegesis. In addition, different ethnic and cultural perspectives are presented as resources for contextually relevant interpretations of the Bible.

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46 Nadella, Rise (see note 10), 715.  
47 (vol. 75), Atlanta 1996. In the same year, by the way, appeared the related volume Gerald West/Musa W. Dube (eds.), „Reading With“: An exploration of the interface between critical and ordinary readings of the Bible. African Overtures (Semeia 73), Atlanta 1996.  
49 Published by Bloomsbury, Sheffield Academic Press.
This theme is further elaborated and deepened in the second volume of the series entitled *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, again edited by Sugirtharajah in 1999. The question of the postcolonial significance and the benefits of an exegesis that draws on indigenous traditions and encyclopaedias in indigenous languages is explored.

The collection of essays *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, edited by Stephen Moore and Fernando Segovia in 2005, also appeared in this series. The articles collected here explore the relationship between postcolonial biblical hermeneutics and exegesis on the one hand and feminist, ethnic, post-structuralist and Marxist perspectives on the other, and they do so at a high level of reflection.

A special event was the publication of *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings* in 2007, edited by Fernando F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah. The commentary on all New Testament writings is introduced by a comprehensive contribution by Segovia (pp. 1-68). Here he analyses the commentaries in a comparative way, using the following criteria: 1. postcolonial configurations; 2. exegetical approaches; 3. positioning between New Testament writings and early Christian faith communities on the one hand and the socio-political reality in the Roman Empire on the other; 4. the relationship between these positionings and the respective exegetes. As a result of his analysis, this commentary presents a broad spectrum of partly contradictory hermeneutical definitions, approaches and positionings within postcolonial biblical hermeneutics and exegesis.

The volume ends with a short essay by Sugirtharajah, who considers the next phase of postcolonial, biblical interpretation in a rather provocative way (pp. 455-466). In view of an ostensibly belligerent neo-imperialism in the name of democracy, humanity and liberation, he calls for a postcolonial penetration of exegesis, which has not yet been completed and in some cases not even begun, as well as the broadening of the horizon of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics in the direction of a (self-)critical analysis of terrorist attacks in the name of Islam and of the phenomenon of asylum seekers.

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The *Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, edited by Sugirtharajah, was initially only available online or as an e-book from 2018. The hardcover version was not published until the beginning of November 2023, with individual articles having been silently updated in the meantime. An introduction by the editor (“The Bible, Empires, and Postcolonial Criticism”, pp. 1-21) is followed by 30 articles under the following headings:

Biblical Empires in the Hebrew Scriptures, Inter-Testamental Writings, the New Testament, and the Christian Apocrypha / Modern European and Asian Empires / Empires and Translations / Postcolonial Social and Ethical Concerns / Postcolonial Biblical Criticism and Cognate Disciplines / Postcolonialism, Biblical Studies, and Theoretical Orientations.

The publication of this handbook once again impressively demonstrates the breadth of the spectrum of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics and exegesis. Now that this research perspective with its diverse methodology has been recognised by renowned Anglophone publishing houses, the question now arises as to its reception within German-language exegesis – where the canon of historical-critical exegesis was once developed and where it has dominated the field of biblical exegesis almost undisputed until recently.

4. **On the reception in German-language exegesis**

In German-language exegesis, the studies of postcolonial-oriented exegetes have so far only been recognised marginally and with a considerable time lag. In this respect, postcolonial hermeneutics and exegesis have fared no differently than previous changes in perspective over the last 50 years, which also began in the English-speaking world and called into question research findings, hermeneutical and theological preconceptions and attitudes that were previously believed to be universally valid: Be it in relation to a differentiated perception of ancient Judaism, the related New Perspective on Paul, feminist exegesis, exegesis based on literary and cultural studies, criticism of the two-source theory and more.

As far as postcolonial perspectives are concerned, the fact that there is no significant diaspora presence from former German colonial territories in this country that could introduce postcolonial impulses into theology
and exegesis is a further complicating factor in contrast to the Anglophone world. It is only in recent years that the situation has begun to change somewhat in this respect, especially through students with an indirect African migration history who are pursuing postcolonial studies and are committed to combating racism, albeit mostly outside of theology. Global migration movements in recent decades, which have led to a diversification of the local population, have only very recently led to a reflection on the phenomena and significance of migration, diaspora existence and interculturality in theological disciplines.

Contributions to postcolonial hermeneutics and exegesis in Germany were initially recognised and published primarily outside of New Testament scholarship. In German-speaking theology, biblical hermeneutical contributions by the important postcolonial exegetes Kwok Pui-lan, Fernando F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah were first introduced in 2012 in the thematic issue on Postcolonial Theology of the journal Interkulturelle Theologie. This was followed in 2013 by a text edition expanded to

51 Significantly, neither the Bible nor postcolonial exegesis are mentioned in the comprehensive handbook Postcolonialism and Literature, edited by Dirk Göttzsche/Axel Dunker/Gabriele Dübeck (Stuttgart 2017).


53 In her cultural studies introduction to postcolonialism, Doris Bachmann-Medick was one of the first in Germany to refer to the exegetical work of Musa W. Dube, Fernando F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah, see Doris Bachmann-Medick, Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften (rowohlt enzyklopädie), Reinbek bei Hamburg 2010, 208 and 229 et seq, but cf. already my detailed presentation and analysis of Dube, Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, in: Kahl, Jesus als Lebensretter, 95-100 from 2007, as well as the explicit appreciation of postcolonial hermeneutical approaches in Stefan Akier’s textbook Neues Testament (UTB basics), Tübingen 2010, 67-72; and Werner Kahl, Akademische Bibelinterpretationen in Afrika, Lateinamerika und Asien angesichts der Globalisierung, in: VF 54/1 (2009), 45-59; ibid, Gottesgerechtigkeit und politische Kritik – neutestamentliche Exegese angesichts der gesellschaftlichen Relevanz des Evangeliums, in: ZNT 31 (2013), 2-10, here: 6-8.

include further theological and exegetical contributions, for example by Musa Dube, again under the responsibility of the missiologist and ecumenical scholar Andreas Nehring, this time in collaboration with the Old Testament exegete Simon Wiesgickl: *Postkoloniale Theologien: Bibelhermeneutische und kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge*. Both published a follow-up volume in 2017 with reactions from German-speaking theologians, including exegetes: *Postkoloniale Theologien II. Perspektiven aus dem deutschsprachigen Raum*.

In their initial reactions, some German-speaking New Testament scholars reacted rather irritated and generally dismissively to the drafts, concerns, approaches and claims of postcolonial exegetes. Despite the fact that postcolonial exegesis is also worthy of criticism, an astonishing arrogance – in view of the partial questionability of the methods and the rapid decay of some of the results of Western historical-critical exegesis – comes to expression here, which once again impressively confirms the hegemonic claim of Western exegesis, as it has been named and criticised by colleagues from the Global South.

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57 Cf. the assessment by Ulrich Luz, *Theologische Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2014, 279-281. Lukas Bormann, *Gibt es eine postkoloniale Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (in: Andreas Nehring/Simon Wiesgickl [eds.], *Postkoloniale Theologien II. Perspektiven aus dem deutschsprachigen Raum*, Stuttgart 2017, 186-204) is probably the first essay by a German New Testament scholar to deal exclusively with postcolonial theology or hermeneutics: Bormann’s arguments are at times problematic and highly reductive, for example when he erroneously refers to the volume of essays *Still at the Margins*, edited by Sugirtharajah in 2008, as a „compendium“ and, by pointing to the lack of names of some Western exegetes in the volume’s index, implies that postcolonial exegesis „does not deal with theological exegesis in a scholarly way“ (201). In fact, authoritative publications in the field of postcolonial exegesis have dealt with the works of representatives of classical exegesis from the very beginning, for example already in the first edition of *Voices from the Margin* from 1991 (C. K. Barrett, F. F. Bruce, R. Bultmann, E. Haenchen, J. Jeremias, G. von Rad, G. Strecker, G. Theissen and C. Westermann; cf. Westermann); cf. Christopher Stanley (ed.), *The Colonised Apostle. Paul in Postcolonial Eyes*, Minneapolis, MN 2011 (theologies by R. Bultmann, N. T. Wright and J. Dunn); *Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings from 2007* (e.g. in the contribution on the Epistle to the Romans by Neil Elliott: e.g. C. K. Barrett, H. Bartsch, F. C. Baur, J. C. Beker, R. Bultmann, J. J. Collins, J. Dunn, D. Georgi, E. Käsemann, H. Räisänen, G. Theissen, F. Watson). For Bormann, the criterion for evaluating postcolonial approaches is „historical-critical exegesis“. He does not reflect on the demand of postcolonial exegesis for a critique of ideology, especially of the historical-critical canon of methods.
However, the picture here is beginning to change: Some New Testament publications in very recent years indicate a growing interest in postcolonial hermeneutics and exegesis. They are characterised by the ability to take a differentiated view of this research perspective and its methods, and they know how to combine it productively with classical exegetical approaches to the New Testament.⁵⁸

5. Appreciation of postcolonial hermeneutics and exegesis

It was primarily New Testament scholars in the West with biographical connections to countries of the Global South who founded and promoted the paradigm of postcolonial hermeneutics and exegesis in the last decade of the 20th century. This field of research has become highly differentiated due to the various interests of exegetes who have joined the discourse over time – be it at universities or seminaries in Africa, Asia, Latin America or Oceania, be it in the USA or Great Britain. Due to colonial history and its aftermath, the postcolonial paradigm has proven to be adaptable in one way or another for theologians and exegetes in many regions of the world.

The following suggestions and requests from post-colonial perspectives seem to me to be of particular importance for New Testament exegesis in Western countries in view of globalisation, migration and the shift in the centre of gravity of world Christianity towards the Global South:

1. A critical reflection on exegesis with regard to its theological and ideological preconceptions.

2. The acknowledgement of the contextuality of Western exegesis and the provisional nature of its results.

3. Discarding the hegemonic claim to absoluteness in Western exegesis.

4. Examining the contribution of particular cultural exegeses to the elucidation of possible dimensions of meaning in New Testament texts. 59

5. The analysis of the meaning of the Gospel in the face of power relations in the Roman Empire and the differentiated survey of early Christian positionings in power constellations.

6. Paying attention to constructions of the “own” versus the “other”.

7. Develop an ethics of interpretation in relation to biblical texts and contemporary, academic and popular readings, centred on justice and mercy as core gospel values.

Like all other exegetical approaches, postcolonial approaches are not beyond criticism. This seems to me to be particularly the case with regard to a widespread ideologisation in the name of decolonisation, 60 as advocated in a prominent strand of postcolonial hermeneutics. The demand for decolonisation directed against spheres of influence of the West at times goes hand in hand with the romanticisation and idealisation of ethnic cultures. It minimises the agency of people, e.g. from African cultures in the past and present and thwarts postcolonial concepts of agency, hybridity and the interconnectedness of cultures. 61 The anachronistic equation of colonial or imperial power relations in modernity and the present with those in antiquity, which can be found in some postcolonial studies, is problematic. The Roman Empire with its claim to be a guarantor of peace requires a differentiated – and not a stereotypical, binary – analysis. 62

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59 Cf. Esther E. Acolatse, Powers, Principalities, and the Spirit. Biblical Realism in Africa and the Wedt, Grand Rapids 2018; Eve-Marie Becker/Jens Herzer/Angela Standhartinger/Florian Wilk (eds.), Reading the New Testament in the Manifold Contexts of a Globalised World. Exegetical Perspectives (NET 32), Tübingen 2022, as well as the volumes of the series New Testament Studies in Contextual Exegesis (Frankfurt) and Bible in Africa Studies (Bamberg); see Blount, Cultural Interpretation.


62 Cf. critically Alkier, Neues Testament (see note 54), 203-209.
Overall, postcolonial hermeneutics has provided important impulses that New Testament exegesis in Western countries – the same applies to its Old Testament counterpart⁶³ – will only be able to ignore to its detriment in the age of globalisation. In the intercultural exchange about possible interpretations and meanings of biblical texts, frictions arise due to the different world knowledge systems involved, which can prove to be mutually productive.⁶⁴ The development of an intercultural hermeneutics from a postcolonial perspective, which also reflects on such a productive interrelation of different hermeneutical and exegetical approaches from a discourse-theoretical perspective, appears to be an urgent task for contemporary New Testament scholarship.

⁶³ Cf. Wiesgickl, Das Alte Testament (see note 8).