

POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM AND THE GOSPEL OF MARK: AN ASSESSMENT

BY

RYAN AUSTIN FITZGERALD

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Religion

May 2011

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Approved By

Mary Foskett, Ph.D., Advisor

Kenneth Hoglund, Ph.D.

Fred Horton, Ph.D.

Acknowledgments

I would like to give greatest thanks to Dr. Mary Foskett for having more faith in me during this project than I often had in myself. Through numerous academic and personal setbacks she has encouraged me to finish the tedious task that is presented below. This could not have been a possibility without her advisement and support along the way.

I also thank my friend and fellow graduate student Brandon J. White at Emory University's Candler School of Theology for the years of peer review, constructive criticism and good humored competition. He has been a consistent source of intellectual conversation, academic aid and emotional support. I would not have had the motivation to complete this project without Brandon heckling me along the way.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: UNSURE BEGINNINGS.....	1
CHAPTER 2: EMPIRE AND METHOD.....	6
The Framework of Empire.....	6
Imperial Domination of Palestinian Jews.....	9
What is “Postcolonialism”?.....	18
Terminology.....	20
Models of Postcolonial Interpretation of the New Testament.....	22
Conclusion.....	28
CHAPTER 3: POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM IN MARK.....	30
Postcolonial Models of the Gospel of Mark.....	30
CHAPTER 4: TAT-SIONG BENNY LIEW'S MARK.....	40
Superscript (Un)Subtleties.....	40
Introducing Prophetic Nature of Jesus and John.....	44
Tat-siong Benny Liew's Reading of Mark.....	46
Mark and Power.....	54
Apocalypse and Time.....	55
Authority.....	56
Conclusion.....	61
CHAPTER 5: POSTCOLONIALISM AS ONE OF THE MANY.....	63
Methodology and Meaning Making.....	63
Methodological Alternatives.....	67
Conclusion.....	76
Bibliography.....	79
Curriculum Vitae.....	82

Chapter 1 – Unsure Beginnings

The 1996 publication of an issue of *Semeia* dedicated to the study of postcolonial criticism and the implications it had for biblical studies may have generated an increase in academic interest in postcolonial application.¹ In the introduction, editor Laura E. Donaldson recalls Edward Said's 1978 work *Orientalism*, in which Said exposed the imperial tendency of the Occident to make the Orient primitive and "Other" to note the urgency of meeting the challenge postcolonialism presents to biblical scholarship.² Specifically, Donaldson argues the case for greater hermeneutical awareness of the socio-political power structures that inform the role of women, foreigners and other oppressed peoples. Simon Samuel regards Donaldson's contribution as the "first published work" on postcolonialism and biblical interpretation.³ Now that more than a decade has elapsed since the *Semeia* volume was published, it is appropriate to assess the location of postcolonial criticism in the field of biblical studies.

Since the early 1990s postcolonial criticism of the Bible has grown in academic circles, drawing much attention and criticism alike. As is the case with any methodology, there is no absolute way of applying it. Advocates of postcolonial criticism may disagree on the best application for utilizing it and whether the literature the scholar is examining lends itself to the method. The essays in Donaldson's collection alone span topics from

¹ Laura E. Donaldson et al., *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading, Semeia vol 75* (1996).

² *Ibid.*, 1.

³ Simon Samuel, *A Postcolonial Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2007), 14.

the formation of the Hebrew canon under Persian imperialism⁴ to Markan Christology.⁵ The effectiveness of this collection is that in demonstrating so early the versatility of postcolonialism in biblical studies, it quickly piqued the interests of scholars across the board.

With any relatively new methodology, after some time we must ask what is gained from its use. Is it only useful in the third millennium because every other aspect of the Bible has been exhausted over the course of two thousand years? Does postcolonialism do justice to the biblical texts being examined? Does postcolonialism take into account the history of textual transmission in its analyses? Is it anachronistic to apply this modern theory to ancient texts? These questions and more are being asked and it is the responsibility of the scholar to reckon with these challenges.

The aim of this paper is to assess the usefulness of postcolonial biblical criticism, using the gospel of Mark as a case study to determine its effectiveness. I have chosen Mark as my focus for a few reasons. It is the oldest of the four gospels, representing the earliest extant presentation of Jesus of Nazareth. I am very interested in the beginning of the Christian movement. I therefore find the earliest literature on Jesus especially fascinating. It is also my favorite gospel. It does not read smoothly and reveals itself to be a strong and fresh portrait of Jesus lacking in the editorial expertise present in the other canonical gospels.

⁴ Jon L. Berquist, "Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives for Canonization," in *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading*.

⁵ Jim Perkinson, "A Canaanitic Word in the Logos of Christ; or The Difference the Syro-Pheonician Woman Makes to Jesus," in *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading*.

This study focuses on Mark and the ways in which the emerging Christian movement created an interstitial discourse of resistance and accommodation through its literature. Postcolonial criticism allows us to examine Mark's response to Roman imperialism. Some theories suggest that Mark resists the Roman empire as a pacifist; others that maintain Mark counters the empire with violent aggression, opposing everything for which the Roman (or any) empire stands. I explore the postcolonial notions of hybridity and mimicry in which Mark reappropriates imperial terminology and power structures in his portrayal of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.

Chapter 2 examines ways in which empires, specifically the Roman empire, use military, political, economic and ideological power to subdue colonized nations. I argue that ideological force is the most powerful of the four. This ideological control is most successful when the subjugated people begin to believe that their colonized position is normative and thus accept their status. I explore Josephus' portrayal of several conflicts between Roman authorities and Jews. Seeing the ways the Jews have resisted the Roman empire in the first century helps contextualize Mark as resistant literature. Furthermore, knowing how the Romans responded in these situations may reveal what kind of control they were protecting. Obviously the worst punishments were reserved for the worst offenses, and it can be shown that above all personal offenses such as murder or theft, political crimes (several of them nonviolent) receive the most cruel sentences. However, pockets of resistance always persist. After establishing a precedence for anti-(Roman)imperial ideology among suppressed natives I turn to postcolonial criticism and Simon Samuel's models. These models are specifically applied to biblical literature.

In chapter 3 I show how several people have applied the models Samuel has identified to Mark. Samuel views these models as too limited in scope. They each address certain aspects of the texts, but none takes into account the many complexities of the gospel. Samuel then offers his own way forward that attempts to bring all aspects of the text together more comprehensively. For reasons that I clarify later, I choose Tat-siong Benny Liew's model of "colonial mimicry" to read closely in the succeeding chapter.

I present Liew's postcolonial model in Chapter 4. Liew employs the idea of colonial mimicry to analyze the way Mark appears to re-produce imperial structures in the portrayal of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. He argues that while strongly resisting the Roman empire Mark's Jesus actually accepts several tenets of empire such as insider-outsider binarisms, might-makes-right ethics and "serve-or-be-destroyed"⁶ attitudes. I use examples from Mark to show how Liew demonstrates this internalized imperial attitude. I conclude that Liew may not apply his methodology perfectly, as Samuel notes, but that he does so appropriately and responsibly enough to warrant it.

In the final chapter I take a step away from postcolonial criticism to review some other methodologies that have been applied to Mark and other biblical literature. The goal is not to "fill in the gaps" but show how no methodology is all-encompassing or final; methodology can only ever be penultimate. I will show how narrative, reader-response, deconstructionist and feminist criticisms all approach texts in ways that privy them to different conversations and varied results. I will conclude that postcolonial

⁶ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1993), 168.

criticism deserves a place alongside these methodologies as a legitimate critical hermeneutic.

Chapter 2 – Empire and Method

The Framework of Empire

Before “postcolonialism” can be defined we must examine “colonialism.” As Samuel introduces it,

Colonialism in the modern period appears not only to be a political and economic enterprise but also a discursive intrusion into the cultural and perceptual spheres of the colonized peoples.⁷

This “discursive intrusion” occurs through the variety of modes of domination pressured on the colonized. The primary reason for colonizing another society is economic. To take control of the natural resources, production and monetary system while introducing additional taxes results in a surplus of money to those in power in the colonizing nation. The imperial center leeches money and resources from its peripheral states. Originally coming from the Latin word *colonia*, colonial practices progressed from an agricultural foundation to a militarized endeavor during the imperial Hellenistic and Roman periods to enforce foreign rule and ultimately secure taxation.⁸ Samuel cites Elleke Boehmer's suggestion that “imperialism” is “the authority assumed by a state over another territory – authority expressed in pageantry and symbolism, as well as military power” and colonialism is “the consolidation of imperial power...manifested in the settlement of territory, the exploitation or development of resources, and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands.”⁹ These definitions portray imperialism as an ideology and colonialism as a political and economic structure; imperialism as an

⁷ Samuel, 1.

⁸ Ibid, 1.

⁹ Ibid., 2. Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2.

ideological concept is realized through the colonization of a people. As Samuel notes, a number of theorists interpret the ideological hegemony and cultural mimicry of colonized people as “colonialism,” and “postcolonialism” as the “discursive decolonizing strategy” that develops to challenge this phenomenon.¹⁰

The Roman empire utilized several modes of power to facilitate the process of political takeover. The term “colonization” refers most accurately to setting up living communities in another country (e.g. the American colonies). The Roman practice consisted not of this, but subtle infiltration. The Roman empire is my case study because of the native response. When I refer to “postcolonialism” I do so ideologically to refer to the native attitude, not to a temporal “after-colonialism.” I will define the term in detail later. I will now address the forms of control Rome used over foreign nations to support my use of this term.

John Dominic Crossan, using Michael Mann, proposes a commonly accepted presentation of the sources of social power using the ancient Roman empire as his case study.¹¹ He lists four main avenues of power that the Romans used to exert control over natives: Military, economic, political and ideological.¹² Military power is the most visual. The presence of armies and military outposts are constant reminders that rebellious acts and subversive behaviors will be suppressed. Although most areas within the empire were unoccupied by full armies, the periphery had regularly stationed troops

¹⁰ Samuel, 2.

¹¹ There have been some objections to certain models of ancient empires from some classicists.

¹² John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 12.

to act as this deterrent.¹³ The military struck fear into the native population. It is in fact the military that obtained the territory in the first place, either by defeating the native armies or simply by threatening to attack if the natives failed to surrender. Once military power is established in a locale, the government can enforce a tax and/or tribute on people who often would rather be taxed than annihilated.

The military was also utilized to provide infrastructure to facilitate mobilization in times of need. This set the stage for the economic aspect of Roman imperialism. On the simplest level this could have involved merely an additional tax that was to be paid to the empire for the purpose of supporting the military troops deployed locally. These troops would use the roads to facilitate the transportation of taxed goods as well. Often enough such money also made its way back to the center of power in the empire, allowing the elite to prosper. Temples may be built, roads may be laid, industrialization and farming revolutions may occur. It is the empire and its elites that profit from these, rarely those from whom the required resources have been extracted. These taxes supply the imperial metropolis its “peace and prosperity.”¹⁴ Thus Roman citizens generally raised no objection to the conquering of foreigners.

Those in imperial authority also control who governs the colonized nation, and thus they exercise considerable political power. Native authorities may be deposed or demoted to be replaced by a foreign governor. The governors of colonized nations are controlled by the central government and help enforce imperial legislature. The influence of empire trickles down to the colonized while the wealth and resources travel up the

¹³ Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2003), 22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

ranks to the center. What prevents such a system from collapsing is the fourth and most important source of imperial power, namely, ideology.¹⁵

For Crossan, ideological power is the glue that holds empires together. Crossan emphasizes ideological power because

Rome spoke of itself in transcendental terms as an empire divinely mandated to rule without limits of time or place. It did not simply proclaim dominion around the Mediterranean Sea. It announced world conquest, global rule, and eternal sovereignty.¹⁶

This proclamation goes beyond any military, economic or political power. It is the grandest claim an empire can make. If a society believes it is dominated by a power that is simply stronger, it can fight against it with more weapons. If this society is driven to believe that the gods themselves have ordained the imperial rule, what could motivate it to oppose such rule? If an empire can condition its inhabitants to believe that it is divinely ordained, it can eliminate the will to revolt. These sources of imperial power will be explored in greater depth when we take a look at the New Testament and the gospel of Mark specifically.

Imperial Domination of Palestinian Jews

It must be noted that the Hebrew people in and around Jerusalem had rarely seen national independence in the centuries prior to Roman rule. After the Babylonian empire destroyed the temple and exiled Jerusalem's inhabitants in the early sixth century BCE the Jews were subject to whichever world power had replaced the preceding one. The Persian empire conquered the Babylonian, allowing the Jews to return to their homeland

¹⁵ Crossan, 15.

¹⁶ Ibid., 15.

and rebuild their temple in the late sixth century. The Persians were themselves pushed out by the Greek empire in the fourth century. After Alexander's death in 323 BCE, his empire, which included Palestine, became a battlefield among his successors, the Diadochi. The Jews did not see independence again until after the Maccabean revolt under Antiochus IV Epiphanes and this event deserves attention. The importance of this event for this paper is more than just its influence on Jewish history; it demonstrates the ideological forces of imperialism and the way it can cause violent revolt among inhabited people. More specifically, it sets the tone for the next 200 years of Jewish ambivalence towards the culture of the concurrent empire.

Even before Antiochus IV there is evidence that the Jews were more unnerved by the Greek empire than prior ones. Daniel 7.7 mentions a "fourth beast" that is "different from all the beasts that had preceded it." The book of Daniel, written c. 165 BCE, is set during the sixth century Babylonian captivity of the Jews and chronicles several visions of the prophet Daniel. The four beasts that he envisions represent an empire that dominated the Jewish people, with the fourth beast representing the latest of the empires, the Greeks.¹⁷ Unlike prior empires, the Greeks demonstrated a program of cultural and political influence over the people through Hellenization.¹⁸ This process of Hellenization was effective even among the Jewish people, as demonstrated by the production of the Septuagint by the second century BCE. Nonetheless, it was met by Jewish ambivalence. 1 Maccabees, a late second or early first century Jewish document, calls out Jews who

¹⁷ See John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

¹⁸ Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 16-7.

“built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil” (1 Macc. 1.14-5). The story continues with Antiochus IV desiring everyone to give up their own customs and adopt Greek ones, lamenting how even some from Israel did such things. Furthermore, Antioch banned Jewish practices such as burnt offerings, circumcision, possessing the book of the covenant, etc (1 Macc. 1.44-61).

Josephus, likely using 1 Maccabees as a source, verifies these events, noting a halt on daily sacrifices for three and a half years¹⁹ and the order to “dissolve the laws of their country, and to keep their infants uncircumcised, and to sacrifice swine’s flesh upon the altar.”²⁰ Even though Daniel was most likely written under the reign of Antiochus IV, making it the earliest of the three aforementioned documents, it is probable that at least some uneasiness towards Hellenization existed before the second century BCE as well.

Despite the polemics of the Jewish literature above, the Greek culture was typically less forced onto natives but attractive to them. Erich S. Gruen remarks that Judaism and Hellenism were not mutually exclusive, and that a gain of one does not mean the loss of the other.²¹ Gruen also notes that “Hellenism” was hardly a single cultural entity and that it “signifies complex amalgamations in the Near East in which the Greek ingredient was a conspicuous presence rather than a monopoly” just as “Judaism” does not demarcate a uniform tradition.²² Instead of Greeks pressuring the Jewish natives

¹⁹ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, I.1.i.

²⁰ Josephus, *Wars*, I.1.ii, also Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XII.5-6.

²¹ Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998),

xiv.

²² *Ibid.*, xiv.

into conforming to a superior culture, the Greeks simply “set up camp,” so to speak and all were welcome to join the melting pot. Programs such as gymnasiums and poleis were constructed and the Jews could likely choose their own level of involvement. This involvement did appear offensive to some Jews, as the literature indicates, but it would be unfair to judge all Jewish attitudes by the scarce extant evidence. In fact, even the polemic writing of 1 Maccabees requires the reader to assume that many Jews were attracted to certain Greek customs, otherwise there would be little reason to condemn them so harshly.

Although it is impossible to say with certainty what the “last straw” of Antiochus’ program was, what finally forced the Jews into rebellion under the leadership of Judas Maccabee was the refusal of a priest of the Hasmonean family, Mattathias, to sacrifice to an idol. Mattathias fled with his five sons after killing a Jew who went ahead of him to perform the pagan act. One of Mattathias’ sons, Judas Maccabeus (Hammer) then led a successful revolt against the Seleucid empire, regaining Jewish independence in 164 BCE.²³ This lasted until the entry of the Romans in 63 BCE.²⁴

The Maccabean revolt demonstrates the power of ideological imperialism. The Jews, as has been noted, had been under foreign domination for centuries but only this once revolted to such an extent that it was successful. This can be explained in light of the four methods of imperialism listed above. All preceding empires dominated the Jews in definite military, economic and political manners. It wasn’t until Alexander’s empire, however, that ideological imperialism was wielded with such force. This is not to say

²³ See Josephus, *Antiquities*, XII.6 and Josephus, *Wars*, I.1.

²⁴ See Josephus, *Antiquities*, XIV.2.iii-XIV.3.

that the Jews were never ideologically influenced by empires before Alexander. However, the imperial/ideological influences of these empires pre-dating Alexander had more or less left the Jews to be Jews. Even the Greeks for a time, while definitely promoting Hellenization under Alexander, also accepted that the Jews had their own ways and they were left to their own devices. As noted above, the Septuagint is an example of how the Jewish and the Greek world could coexist.

When Antiochus IV began instituting laws against the practices of Judaism, however, the story changed. Though it was enforced by the military, it was not the presence of the army that spawned revolt. Though the political position of the High Priesthood was intimately tied to the authority of a foreign king, this was nothing new. The Jews seemingly had had enough when the imperial ideology was perceived as exclusive. This perceived attack on Jewish identity and culture was a form of imperialism that was intolerable. Cultural/ideological imperialism succeeds when it is accepted by natives. The subversive and unconscious internalization of foreign rule works best when unseen, or at least accepted as divinely ordained. This event demonstrates that ideological imperialism could fail. Following are examples of Roman ideological imperialism that shaped the landscape of the first century CE and in what ways ideological imperialism could be successful, or at least not result in bloody revolt.

When Pompey led his conquest of Judea he was not met with much opposition, mainly due to the turmoil surrounding the High Priesthood. Pompey was practically invited in exchange for his support to Hyrcanus II. After his arrival, however, things took

a less amiable turn as he laid siege to the temple.²⁵ Much of the following history between the Romans and the Jews was uneventful, though a few instances of tension and hostility do stand out. The Roman attitude towards the Jews was a mixture of respect, confusion, amusement, wonder or even disgust as the Jews held unusual beliefs and practices such as monotheism, reverence to one single temple and circumcision.²⁶

One event especially worth noting is the vandalism of the Roman eagle in the Jerusalem temple in 4 BCE. Herod the Great instituted many building projects, not least of which was renovating the temple. However, one of his additions was a large golden eagle, the symbol of the Roman empire. Here is an example of the willingness of the Jewish elite (Herod in this case) to accommodate Roman imperialism. Two learned Jewish men of great repute for their interpretations of the Law, Judas son of Saripheus and Matthias son of Margalothus persuaded a group of their disciples to take down the eagle, as it was against the Law to make images or representations of living creatures. Furthermore, one can speculate that its location at the eastern gate of the temple which leads to Gentile court was more insulting than it would have been elsewhere. These men proceeded to cut down the eagle and chop it up into pieces with axes in broad daylight, believing that though they could end up being condemned to death, their actions would live on in the memories of their ancestors. They were caught and brought to Herod who had them bound and brought to Jericho to face trial in front of a group of prominent Jews. According to Josephus, Herod claimed that the eagle was dedicated to the temple in

²⁵ See Josephus, *Antiquities*, XIV.15.iii and Josephus, *Wars*, I.7.

²⁶ Martin Goodman, 'The Temple in First-Century CE Judaism,' in *Judaism in the Roman World: Collected Essays*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 47.

honor of God and their destruction of it was not only an affront to Herod but to God. For fear of Herod's temper, the Jews did not defend the acts of the seditionists, who were burned alive.²⁷

Josephus elsewhere relates that shortly after these executions Herod died and a great lamentation rose up from the Jews in the city for those put to death. Many demanded that those under Herod who were responsible for their deaths be executed themselves for killing pious and righteous men. Herod's successor, Archelaus, attempted to send soldiers to persuade the mourners to desist. These attempts were unsuccessful. Then during the Passover celebration when many were gathered at the temple, some still mourning, Archelaus sent a cohort of Roman soldiers to quiet them but were met with violence as several soldiers were stoned and killed. Archelaus then sent his whole army against the Jews in the temple, slaughtering three thousand and dispersing the rest into the hills.²⁸

It would not be unusual for Josephus' claims such as the number of soldiers sent and the number of Jews killed to be exaggerated, but what did happen was likely no trivial event. It is important to note for this study that this was not a specifically Jewish-Roman conflict but an internal Jewish conflict. The event shows the willingness of the client king of Israel to appear loyal to the Romans as well as the Jews in conflicting situations. When faced with the charge of idolatry by the seditionists' actions, Herod reportedly claims that the eagle was in honor to God. Although Herod's motives cannot be proved, given the history of Jewish client kings and High Priests bribing Roman

²⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XVII.6.ii-iv.

²⁸ Josephus, *Wars*, II.1.ii-iii.

authorities to grant them positions of power, it is likely that Herod's alliance was with those who gave him money and power: the Romans.²⁹ It is also important to note that Herod commanded Roman troops to quell the mourners. This shows the reach of Roman military power in Israel. The Romans authorities granted political authority to the Jewish Herod who then used Roman soldiers against peasant Jews. This demonstrates that it was no longer a Roman-Jewish conflict but an interconnected power struggle with the rich and powerful against the poor and uninfluential, regardless of religion. Finally, this event displays the general fear of opposing those in power. When Herod laid the charges against the seditionists before a crowd of prominent Jews, there were no objections to their fate. As soon as Herod died, mourners were not scarce and the landscape changed from consent to complaint against Herod's actions. The acquiescence during Herod's life is not surprising for subjugated people because of the fear of prosecution.

The conflict surrounding the erection of Caligula's statue in the temple in 40 CE also demonstrates the Jewish-Roman tensions of the first century. According to Josephus³⁰, Caligula sent Petronius to Jerusalem to erect a statue of his likeness in the temple, by force if necessary. However, upon Petronius' arrival in Jerusalem, "tens of thousands" of Jews amassed to protest the statue as against the Law of God and declare that they would rather die than let it be erected. Petronius went to Tiberius to assess the situation. The Jews followed him and, in dramatic display, lay prostrate for 40 days with their necks extended for execution. This was during the tilling season so the crops were abandoned for all this time. Petronius reportedly saw two options: go to war with the

²⁹ See Josephus, *Antiquities* XIV.14 for how Herod bribed his way into kingship.

³⁰ Josephus, *Antiquities*, XVIII.8.ii-viii.

Jews over the statue or remove the statue. The Jews were eventually permitted to go about their farming business. Then in a possibly legendary scenario between an intoxicated Caligula and Herod Agrippa, Caligula offers Agrippa anything he desires, to which Agrippa's reply is to rescind his order to erect his statue in the Jerusalem temple. Caligula accepts this request so as not to lose honor by breaking a promise in the presence of many.

Here again we see the clash of the wealthy against the peasant farmer. In this case it appears to be Roman against Jew as opposed to the previous example. Again this demonstrates the problem of an idolatrous presence in the Jerusalem temple, one representing Roman authority. However, something new is shown in this example, and that is the reliance the Romans have upon the Jewish peasants. The importance of this event to this study is how the Jews triumphed against the Romans by banding together in peaceful resistance. Whereas the Jews under Herod the Great may have been too few in number to object to his actions, the thousands upon thousands of Jews reported to have (literally) stuck their necks out for the sake of the Law displayed strength in number. A crucial aspect of this story is that it occurred during sowing season. Part of the Roman empire's economic exploitation of a conquered people is the extraction of material goods in the form of crops. These crops served to support the local stations of troops and nearby authorities. The protesting Jews were risking not only their own necks in their demonstration, but also their families' welfare. Furthermore, the local economic stability of the Roman forces was at risk if the crops were not grown in order to be collected. This fact put pressure on the Romans to resolve the issue before it was too late to secure an

acceptable harvest. Josephus reports that when the order to erect the statue was removed, there was a great rain that ended a yearlong drought. It could be noted, however, that if the Jews knew their crops would not grow anyway they had little to lose. If the previous example shows the interconnectedness of the Jewish and Roman authorities, this example demonstrates Roman reliance on its conquered people.

In summation, these three events demonstrate an imperial ideological clash between Rome and the Jews in antiquity, the interconnectedness and accommodation of Jews of several classes (client king, wise men and peasant) and imperial reliance on a level of cooperation by the subjugated people. Ideological, military, economic and political forces were at work in the process of imperialization and that these forces were both the most resisted and the most embraced by the colonized Jewish people. Now the methodology of postcolonialism can be addressed.

What is "Postcolonialism"?

I will use Samuel's definitions of the following terms in order to ensure a more consistent reading. "Colonial literature/discourse" describes in general what develops in a colonial context on the side of both the colonized and colonist. "Colonist" strictly denotes the colonizer. "Post-colonial" is simply a temporal term to indicate a society in the time beyond imperial control. "Postcolonialism" without the hyphen³¹ will mean

that which originates in an interstitial space between the colonists and the colonized, which accommodates and disrupts both the native and the alien colonial discourses of power. In this respect 'post' in postcolonialism may

³¹ See R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12-13.

signify an interstitial ‘spatial’ category and a critical discursive strategy and not necessarily a polarity (anti) or sequentiality (after).³²

Postcolonialism is an ideological response to the imperial forces dominating a society.

Although this will be the working definition of “postcolonialism” in this study, certain flexibility is required. Sanjay Seth noted in 1998 that postcolonialism developed out of the tradition of de-colonization in the 20th century and that it is

not a new discipline, nor a clearly identifiable field of research. The term, undeniably and necessarily vague, a gesture rather than a demarcation, points not towards a new knowledge, but rather towards an examination and critique of knowledges.³³

R. S. Sugirtharajah notes that postcolonialism is “criticism” and not “theory” as it is “a collection of critical and conceptual attitudes... Criticism is not an exact science, but an undertaking of social and political commitment which should not be reduced to or solidified into a dogma.”³⁴ Not only is the term necessarily vague, but sometimes it is consequentially absent. Even Richard A. Horsley, a scholar whom Samuel cites as an exemplar of postcolonial criticism, never once uses the term in his book *Jesus and Empire* where it would be expected.³⁵ Sugirtharajah remarks that the term therefore is not a demarcation of a strict realm of scholarship or a specific field of research but is representative of a general method of analyzing ancient texts with an eye towards the discursive strategies of those dominated by a foreign power.

³² Samuel, 3.

³³ Sanjay Seth, “Postcolonial Studies: A Beginning...” in *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (London, UK: Routledge, 1998), 8.

³⁴ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism*, 14.

³⁵ Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*.

In the New Testament literature to be analyzed, the examples of Jewish resistance methods given above will be kept in mind along with other significant events, most notably the Great Revolt of 66 CE to be discussed below. Reading Mark postcolonially will require examination through the lens of the troubled relationship between Jews and Romans and between the social elites and peasantry. What separates postcolonial criticism from a simple acknowledgement of the Greco-Roman backgrounds of the New Testament in this study is the “discursive interstitial space” noted by Samuel. It is not simply an awareness of ideological struggle but a method of reading that examines the coping strategies of the communities that produced the literature and the ways in which that specific community approached the struggle in a resisting *and* accommodating manner. Early Christian literature, developing in the midst of such struggles creates for itself a new discursive space in which to work out ways to survive and overcome the challenges of subjugation.

Terminology

Many terms related to postcolonial criticism are heavily loaded and are used in several different ways by different scholars. Here I will briefly define some terms and explain how they will be used in this study.

When discussing the “location of culture,” to use Bhabha's phrase,³⁶ many stock geographical terms are used for ideological purposes. The “center” refers to the colonizing and imperial forces, the politically dominant and the social elite, or the “ins.” The “periphery” refers to those who do not belong to the class which controls the land

³⁶ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, UK: Routledge 1994).

economically and politically, or the “outs.” The “marginalized” are not necessarily congruous with the “peripheral” though I will at times use them synonymously. A marginalized group is not just *on* the outside but is *forced* to the outside and kept there. This verb of motion stresses distantiation and suppression. The marginalized groups of society do not simply represent the incidentally poor but the intentionally poor. This language, though spatial, is the lingo often used when metaphors of “high” and “low” society are not sufficient. A rich person may not have the proper racial alignment and an imperial citizen may be the child of a slave.³⁷ The language of inside and outside refers to the ideological center that determines and controls policies that are then applied to “everyone else” to keep them “outside.”

Hybridity is a state of in-betweenness that develops when clashing cultures influence each other to create a middle neither/nor-both/and ideological society.³⁸ A “hybrid” is a member of this interstitial community. Hybrid identity entails a(n) (un)conscious awareness of influence that exists in varying degrees among a variety of people on both sides of the fence. This can disrupt communities on both “sides,” altering native traditions and forcing accommodation.

The idea of the “other,” perhaps most popularly attributed to Edward Said,³⁹ simply put, is the attitude of the “insider” towards the “outsider.” An exclusionary comradery of sorts among those in the accepted, normative society that by default causes those excluded to appear alien. This process of “othering” can then be perpetuated

³⁷ The social structure that allows freed slaves to achieve a level of financial success or even Roman citizenship has been referred to as “status inconsistency” in New Testament studies.

³⁸ See Samuel, ch. 1.

³⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Random House, Inc 1978).

intentionally or unintentionally through the representation of the outsider by the insiders. The representation of the Other gives power to the constructors in the Foucauldian sense, this presentation becomes the reality of the Other from the point of view of the insiders. The perpetuation of stereotypes is a powerful way of maintaining the boundaries which outsiders are not invited to cross.

Models of Postcolonial Interpretation of the New Testament

As has been noted, postcolonial criticism does not have set boundaries and strict delineations so categorizing methods within the “field” is on one level a tenuous task. However, there are trends that can be seen among scholars. These trends can be grouped into vague subsections or models. This study draws on Samuel’s work to discuss some of the variety in postcolonial scholarship before directing attention specifically to the gospel of Mark.

The first model Samuel introduces is the essentialist/nativist model.⁴⁰ The basic goal of this model is to retrieve the essential essence of the native tradition that is hidden by the colonizing forces. This method attempts to strip away the clutter of influences from the conflicting cultures to reclaim the purity of the preexisting nativism. Problematically, this makes the assumption that there is such an essence in the first place, though it is admittedly corrupted by outside imperial forces. Samuel notes Gayatri Spivak’s article “Can the Subaltern Speak?”⁴¹ to say that this pure form of native culture does not exist in available literature because it is only produced by “elite others.” The

⁴⁰ Samuel, 15.

⁴¹ Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Ashcroft *et al.* (eds.), *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), 24-8.

native voice is irreversibly ruptured by colonization, making the pure voice of the native which this model searches for impossible to find in the literature produced during colonization. When reading New Testament texts postcolonially it is equally difficult to find the “subaltern” amidst imperial influences. Mark’s gospel cannot be separated from Roman influence on Judaism. Nor can Mark be read without considering the effect the temple's destruction had on Judaism.

The next of Samuel’s models is the resistance/recuperative model with Sugirtharajah being its prime example. The thrust of this model is to read in a way that gives preference to readings that will emphasize the needs of the poor and oppressed over those of the colonists. This reading has more applicability as a strategy against modern interpreters than it does as a method of analyzing ancient texts. It seems that the goal is to change the way contemporary readers use biblical texts as opposed to gaining knowledge of the ancient community. It assumes that “colonialism dominates and determines the interest of the biblical texts”⁴² but does not explore the complexities of ancient struggles. To analyze current interpretation of the text is not an inappropriate aim but it is less applicable to the present study as are other models.

Samuel then lists the diasporic intercultural model. He regards Fernando Segovia as the leading advocate of this. Segovia, as a Cuban-American who relocated from the Caribbean Basin to America moved not only geographically but from the position of a white Cuban in an imperial setting to a Cuban in America, an imperialist setting. In Cuba he was an outsider because he was too white; in the United States he was not white

⁴² Samuel, 17.

enough. Segovia notes the influx of non-Western scholars to the United States has resulted in a great diversity of scholastic methodologies. He therefore incorporates into his scholarship a heavy cross-cultural approach. Segovia considers the diversity and multiculturalism a victory in itself to the marginalized society, a testament to their resistance. That so many non-Westerners have taken up the task of biblical criticism in and outside of the United States “could and should be seen as a veritable process of liberation and decolonization.”⁴³ Segovia sees this trend representative of an increased colonial awareness. Samuel maintains that Segovia fails to take into account the conflict that is created among each individual subculture in Segovia’s model. Samuel notes that “in a cross-cultural carnival one finds diversities but they often exhibit a classless and genderless pan-ethnicity crisscrossing social, cultural and ethnic identities, which makes it impossible to forge an effective culture of resistance.”⁴⁴ He holds that Segovia’s simple attempt to “add more and more voices” in the multicultural interpretation of texts is not sufficient in “resisting the imperialist ‘texts’ and subverting them.” Samuel argues that the cross-cultural carnival creates its own conflicts within competing subcultures and Segovia does not take this into adequate account. Furthermore, he does not think that Segovia responds to postcolonial mimicry, ambivalence, cultural hybridity and how these factors are represented in colonial/postcolonial discourse.

⁴³ Segovia, “Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Towards a Postcolonial Optic,” in *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 52.

⁴⁴ Samuel, 25.

In his own work, it appears that Segovia does oversimplify “the margins” and sets in place a binary opposition between imperial center and colonized periphery.⁴⁵ He does not take into full appreciation the hybridity and cooperation in the colonist/colonized relationship discussed in chapter two. Segovia lists “binomials” such as civilized/uncivilized, advanced/primitive or cultured/barbarian and does not adequately discuss the possible syncretism and reciprocal appeasement of clashing/cooperating cultures. Surely these spectrums can be useful in theory as semantic references but do not function as such in practical application.

Samuel’s final model is the strategic essentialism and transcultural hybridity model. This model explores more of the dynamics between colonist and colonized that the previous model appears to oversimplify. Samuel asserts that previous models run the risk “either to reproduce or perpetuate the colonial structures of thought...or to erase the possibility of an effective subversion of colonialism.”⁴⁶ Essentialist models can emphasize the margins to the extent that they become the new center, the new imperial power. Furthermore, the splintering of subcultures in Segovia’s model can lead to marginal conflict within itself instead of a struggle against an oppressive force. Samuel, relying on Bhabha’s work⁴⁷, breaks this model into three subsections: mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity.

⁴⁵ See Segovia, “Biblical Criticism,” 56-8.

⁴⁶ Samuel, 26.

⁴⁷ Bhabha, *Location*.

Postcolonial mimicry is the repetition of colonial behaviors by the colonized.⁴⁸ It is not a mirror image of such but, as Samuel notes, a “blurred copy.” The effect of this phenomena is that it problematizes the relationship between the colonists and the colonized by blurring the customary boundaries that would have distinguished them. The colonized mimic would be able to “enter and expand into the cultural regimes of their colonial masters” and also to infiltrate the colonial authority, corrupting the unity of the colonial that creates the dichotomy of colonist/colonized. For example, a slave being taught only part of the Bible but not the whole may have more leeway in his or her ability to “follow the rules.” The slave can become more like their Christian masters “but not quite” due to their incomplete knowledge. This can lead to hybridity which is disconcerting to the master. This infiltration can disrupt the imperial order but also compromise the unity of the “native,” creating the hybrid subject. This can also feed some of the models below that can turn the native colonized into the imperial colonist, as boundaries are blurred and cultural hybrids are created which repeat the behaviors of their oppressors.

Postcolonial ambivalence refers to the contradictory desires of the colonized to be attracted to and repulsed by an object. It is related to mimicry because the mimic may often fall into an ambivalent attitude concerning colonial and nativist behavior. Samuel writes, “Ambivalence arouses complicity and attraction in a colonial subject to mimic, but in mimicking the colonial subject ruptures the colonial authenticity and authority and

⁴⁸

Samuel, 27.

in turn acquires the potential for resistance and repulsion of the colonial authority.”⁴⁹ As mentioned in chapter 2, it is unlikely that the colonist charges into a culture and forces its manners on them, but that they “set up camp” and there results a hybrid culture. This is due to the ambivalence of the colonized. If the Romans set up a gymnasium for sport and festivities the Jew might be as attracted to the custom as they are repulsed by its depravity. Despite the desire Palestinian Jews might have had to expel the Romans from their country they might have appreciated the convenience of certain infrastructures such as roads. “Accommodation” is a word that relates to the extent to which the colonized allow (and somewhat desire) the colonists' presence. This can also be problematic for the colonists because of the proximity between mimicry and mockery. Clear delineation is convenient for the colonists as it allows them a stronger center of power, but the power of creating a hybrid culture can be an even more effective way of dominating, even though it actually disrupts the clear insider-outsider binarism. Ambivalence and mimicry both shift the center of power into uncertain and unclearly delineated domains between the hybrid culture of colonist/colonized. For this reason it can be used as an effective strategy of resistance; if it is in fact resistance that is intended. In Mark we may see ambivalence manifested in the acceptance of imperial systems and structures.

The final subsection of this model Samuel simply labels “postcolonial hybridity.”⁵⁰ Drawing on Bakhtinian linguistic categories, Samuel describes this hybridity as a double meaning of cultural language. The same words, even in the same language, contain a second understanding due to the hybridization of cultures already

⁴⁹ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 29.

discussed. When expanded to categories of colonist/colonized this hybridization takes on further implications regarding the blurring relationship between these two entities. The single language of either the colonist or the colonized becomes appropriated and reinterpreted in the language of the other. The evolution of language relies on this hybridization as words and phrases creep into the vocabulary of the “Other.” Not only does this represent an expanding form of linguistic communication but a conflation of culture and customs that proliferate interpretations in, outside and in between the separate entities. It is in this interstitial hybrid space that postcolonialism occurs. This linguistic topic will become much more relevant as it is applied to the Gospel of Mark, a document written in Greek concerning events that most likely occurred in Aramaic settings.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that a strong enough historical precedent exists in the ancient Roman empire to appropriately apply postcolonial criticism to the literature of the first century. Though the Roman process of domination may not be accurately termed “colonial” in a strict sense, “postcolonialism” as a native attitude appropriately describes certain literary devices ancient writers employ. I briefly documented a resistant attitude in ancient texts and the Roman authorities' desire to control natives by violent means. Due to the manner in which the High Priesthood was obtained many Jews likely resented the Jewish authorities. It is not unreasonable to assume even from nonbiblical literature that Jewish authorities were thought of contemptuously by many.

Models of postcolonialism that Samuel has identified demonstrate the variety of its application in biblical criticism. The next chapter reviews several models of

postcolonial criticism of the gospel of Mark and briefly assesses their strengths and weaknesses. One of these models will be examined in greater detail in chapter 4.

Chapter 3 – Postcolonial Criticism in Mark

Several models of postcolonial criticism were discussed briefly in the previous chapter but none of them pertained specifically to interpretation of the gospel of Mark. In this chapter I explore Samuel's examination of postcolonial criticism of Mark's portrayal of Jesus. Samuel proposes that none of the models he identifies adequately takes into account the many complexities of the gospel and suggests an alternate way forward.

Postcolonial Models of the Gospel of Mark

For the purposes of studying the gospel of Mark, Samuel gives four models of postcolonial readings of Mark, the first of which he calls the essentialist postcolonial resistance model, similar to the first model above, as exemplified by Richard Horsley in his 1998 article “Submerged Biblical Histories and Imperial Biblical Studies.”⁵¹ In this article and in other works, Horsley criticizes the past depoliticizing of biblical texts and the reduction of the many aspects of the Bible down to theology.⁵² To Horsley, a postcolonial reading

includes in its agenda the emancipation of previously submerged or distorted histories of the movements that produced the literature that was later included in the Bible – partly by avoiding, opposing, and replacing the essentialist and depoliticizing categories and approaches of imperial Western biblical studies.⁵³

Horsley argues that early Christian writers, such as Paul and Mark, resisted imperial culture by working to restore and build their own communities.

⁵¹ Richard Horsley, “Submerged Biblical Histories and Imperial Biblical Studies,” in *The Postcolonial Bible*, 152.

⁵² Horsley, “Submerged Biblical Histories,” 154. Also Richard Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*, 5.

⁵³ Horsley, “Submerged Biblical Histories,” 155.

Horsley sees the detriment of past interpretations of Mark to be the idea that Mark is a passion narrative with a long introduction.⁵⁴ This reading obscures the political and imperial realities of the narrative before Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. According to Horsley, Mark opposes Roman imperial rule and collaboration with the empire by the native authorities. Mark does this by recalling the Jewish tradition that resists oppression and reviving the prophetic traditions of those who formerly spoke out against imperial empires. Mark's Jesus is a new Moses and Elijah, crossing seas, performing exorcisms, healing and feeding the multitudes. Through a series of prophetic acts Jesus renews Israel. He exorcises the demon Legion who represents the Roman's occupancy of Israel. By healing a hemorrhaging woman and giving new life to a twelve year old girl, Jesus is represented as giving new life to the twelve suffering tribes of Israel. Jesus the Messiah continues the definitively Israelite tradition of prophetic resistance to oppression.

Samuel correctly sees the work of Ched Myers in *Binding the Strong Man* as an example of this same postcolonial model of resistance.⁵⁵ Mark for Myers represents a text written by someone on the periphery of an imperial center.⁵⁶ He states that his interpretation of Mark is aligned with liberation theology, such as that of Gustavo Gutierrez, though Myers is trying to read from the periphery while being in the center himself.⁵⁷ Myers establishes an agenda of repentance and resistance. He seeks to interpret Mark as a reader who himself resists the attraction of the empire in which he is

⁵⁴ Ibid., 156.

⁵⁵ Samuel, 77.

⁵⁶ Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 4.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 7.

located, with the aim to actively “impede imperial progress.”⁵⁸ He sees Mark as a manifesto that seeks to educate imperial subjects about themselves and their position as in order to inspire in them compassion, justice and liberation.⁵⁹ He reads Mark “as an ideological narrative, the manifesto of an early Christian discipleship community in its war of myths with the dominant social order and its political adversaries.”⁶⁰ The “myths” are the cultural ideologies battling for and against hegemony by the Romans and the natives. Though Myers does not use the language of “postcolonialism” he can easily be seen in the same model as Horsley.

Samuel criticizes Horsley’s confidence that the native agenda for decolonization can be discerned from a reading of Mark.⁶¹ Horsley and Myers believe that Mark espouses an essential nativist discourse. Samuel argues that even if this tradition were to exist in the first century, it is not devoid of colonial influences from empires predating the Roman one.⁶² The traditions of Moses and Elijah are not in fact “pure” and untainted by colonizing factors but are closely related to imperial inclinations such as the textual tradition recounting the genocide of the Canaanites and other “natives” defending their land against the Hebrew “imperialists.” Samuel asks how Horsley can claim Jesus as a representative of anti-colonialism when the traditions of Moses and Elijah themselves

⁵⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 31.

⁶¹ Samuel, 82.

⁶² Ibid., 83.

cannot be characterized as anti-colonial.⁶³ This problem is also raised by Mary Ann Tolbert and Tat-Siong Benny Liew.

The second model that Samuel discusses deems Mark to be “a resistant as well as a colonizing discourse.” It is exemplified by Mary Ann Tolbert's article “When Resistance Becomes Repression.”⁶⁴ In Tolbert’s earlier work she places Mark in the genre of popular literature due to its simplistic writing style.⁶⁵ Mark was to be read by a range of higher or lower classes. Due to stylistic similarities to other popular literature of the time, such as ancient Greek erotic novels, Tolbert sees the author of Mark intending to reach a very broad audience.⁶⁶ Whereas in *Sowing the Gospel*, Tolbert does not express a specific “postcolonial” intent, her later article “When Resistance Becomes Repression” poses this theory.⁶⁷ Reading Mark 13’s “Little Apocalypse,” Tolbert sees the gospel's reference to the “counselors,” “governors” and “kings” that will persecute the disciples as polemic against the Roman empire.⁶⁸ Furthermore, in the rest of Mark’s narrative as a critique against those in power, she reads Jesus’ disapproval of the desire for power, wealth, prominence and fame. Tolbert writes “In fact, taken as a whole, the Gospel of Mark presents what amounts to a sustained polemic against traditional social, religious, and political leadership groups by insisting on their consistently evil exercise of

⁶³ Ibid., 83.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 78.

⁶⁵ Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1989), 59, 70.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 65.

⁶⁷ Mary Ann Tolbert, “When Resistance Becomes Repression,” in *Reading From This Place, vol. 2* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995), 331.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 335.

authority.”⁶⁹ Mark’s audience is likely on the margins of political, economic and religious society. Tolbert asserts that Mark can be read as anticolonial literature that hopes for vindication and a future when all of Mark’s enemies will be destroyed and those who follow Jesus will assume God’s political favor.⁷⁰

The third model, represented by the works of Tat-siong Benny Liew, calls Mark “a colonial mimetic discourse representing tyranny, boundary and might.”⁷¹ Liew refuses to grant readings such as those from the previous models the final say. He sees in viewing Mark as resistance literature the tendency to idealize a single aspect of the gospel unduly. Instead, Liew proposes that Mark mimics Roman imperial ideology to continue its own new imperialism.⁷² In his article “Tyranny, Boundary and Might,” Liew discusses the ways in which Mark reproduces the authority of the Roman empire in Jesus, as Mark’s Jesus appears to be running around the countryside ordering people around like a tyrant.⁷³ Mark thus sets up a new “insider-outsider binarism” that functions for Liew as such: “those who respond favorably to Jesus, the authoritative interpreter and fulfillment of God’s will, are ‘in,’ and those who do not are ‘out.’”⁷⁴ When Mark’s Jesus returns there will be a total annihilation of everyone who was “out.” According to Liew, Mark “duplicates the colonial (non)choice of ‘serve-or-be-destroyed.’”⁷⁵ Mark makes the same judgment the perceived Romans make by assuming that some are too barbaric to be given

⁶⁹ Ibid., 335.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 336.

⁷¹ Samuel, 79.

⁷² Ibid., 79.

⁷³ Tat-Siong Benny Liew, “Tyranny, Boundary and Might,” in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (1999), 13-22.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 23.

the right to live. Mark's Jesus/God is the new colonial empire that will reenact Roman repression to a greater degree than the Romans had ever done. Liew ultimately concludes that Mark's Jesus "may have replaced the 'wicked' Jewish-Roman power, but the tyrannical, exclusionary and coercive politics goes on."⁷⁶

Samuel criticizes Liew's "exalted claim" to resist idealizing Mark as resistance literature. To Samuel,

in actual practice of reading, [Liew] idealizes Mark as a colonial mimicry, i.e., Mark internalizes and duplicates the colonial ideology because Liew thinks that in a colonial context the colonized can simply and only internalize the world constructed by the colonists.⁷⁷

Furthermore, Samuel notes that Liew borrows the concept of mimicry from Homi Bhabha but misrepresents it. He claims that Bhabha's application of mimicry to ancient cultures entails an element of mockery that Liew neither appreciates nor fully incorporates in his reading of Mark. As Samuel writes, "Mimicry is not only duplication but also disruptive and menacing."⁷⁸ Samuel also criticizes Liew's limiting view of Jesus as a tyrannical and powerful Son of God without incorporating the aspect of the suffering and crucified son.⁷⁹

The final model Samuel reviews characterizes Mark as "a colonial archive with traces of postcolonial heteroglossy," evidenced in the work of Jim Perkinson.⁸⁰

Perkinson reads the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman as a discourse of power in

⁷⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁷⁷ Samuel, 79.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 84.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 85.

⁸⁰ Jim Perkinson, "A Canaanite Word in the Logos of Christ" in *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading*.

which the sub-altern “other,” the woman in this case, cannot be silenced by Jesus’ colonial suppression of this “other.”⁸¹ The salvific messianic *logos* is spoken in rebuttal to Jesus (the Messiah) and thus saves the woman’s daughter from demonic possession. The woman hears that Jesus is nearby, so she comes to him as the “other” but will not be suppressed by Jesus’ vocal preference for Israel. She then turns the tables on Jesus by invoking the voice that Jesus is supposed to embody, disrupting both the image of the messianic Jesus and Mark’s narrative. Not even in Mark’s narrative about the power of Jesus can the “other” be silenced. Samuel, however, sees this method as tenuous and inapplicable as a rule.⁸² Samuel notes that colonized subjects “speak with a forked tongue, speaking as the dominant and the dominated.”⁸³ Levels of domination are being crossed as well as mixed by the hybrid culture that Mark is writing in/for. Jesus enters a “colonist space” and the “doubly subaltern woman moves from her double subalternity to the place of ‘victorious otherness.’”⁸⁴ Samuel ultimately feels that this model is too narrow in application and scope.

After Samuel discusses the above four models he argues for a fifth model, namely his own. Though he does not put a label on it as neatly as he did for the previous four, I would call his model an “affiliative-disruptive essentialist strategy of appropriation and colonial hybridity.” This very broad and somewhat convoluted title is intentional due to the scope of Samuel’s criticisms of prior models and his effort to meld them all together

⁸¹ Ibid., 69.

⁸² Samuel, 85.

⁸³ Ibid., 85.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 85.

to account for complexities he feels are not adequately treated by the others.⁸⁵ All aspects of transcultural hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence and resistance must be incorporated. He states:

In this portrait Mark leaves us with an indeterminate, fluid picture of *huios*-Jesus that detains and disturbs us from perceiving either a monolithic colonialist or an anti- or pro-colonial perspective of the protagonist. Hence we may possibly say that the portrait of *huios*-Jesus in Mark is a complex colonial/postcolonial one that can possibly be expressed in terms of strategic essentialism and transcultural hybridity, i.e., a picture that accomodates and disrupts both the author's relatively dominant native Jewish culture, traditions and discourses and the alien Roman colonialist culture and discourses of power.⁸⁶

To Samuel, Mark's discourse tries to negotiate that interstitial space between Roman imperial and authoritative Jewish discourses by constructing a portrait of Jesus that is both affiliative and disruptive to the Jewish tradition from which it arises.⁸⁷

In Samuel's model Jesus takes the role of "Son of Humanity," coming down to Israel during a time of struggle to liberate the natives by using the camouflage of authoritative power. The Son of Humanity (*huios anthropou*) is an ambiguous figure to which neither the Romans or the Jews know quite how to respond. The fluidity of the term allows Jesus the freedom to exercise his authority on earth in the midst of the natives.⁸⁸ While Jesus' authority is imitative of Roman oppression it disrupts Jews' authority as well. Mark portrays Jesus being crucified by the Romans due to the persistence of the Jews. Samuel concludes that Jesus' role is ambivalent. Though Jesus comes to disrupt the dominating system of Roman colonialism he is brought to his death

⁸⁵ Ibid., 86.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 153-4.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 153.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 154.

by Jews. Though he is executed by the Romans Pilate appears resistant to this and even a soldier directly responsible for the crucifixion declares “Truly this man was God's Son!” (Mk 15.39)

Ultimately unsatisfied by the four models he initially presents due to their lack of flexibility and complete vision, Samuel proposes a way forward. However, his work is incomplete and only suggestive. He does not offer a sustained, close reading of Mark. Therefore, I have chosen not to examine Samuel's model further but to instead explore Tat-siong Benny Liew's work in detail. Although Liew may idealize his model of colonial mimicry, he makes a consistent and careful argument for it. Samuel objects to Liew's use of Bhabha's “mimicry,” calling it “an inadequate use of the concept...in a colonial/postcolonial discourse,”⁸⁹ but Liew explicitly admits to “turning Bhabha's term on its head” and qualifies his use as a logical extension of the concept.⁹⁰ Given the fluidity of postcolonial criticism, Samuel seems too rigid in his judgment. Finally, though Samuel attempts to incorporate aspects from all models in his own, he spreads himself too thin in his application within the gospel. Samuel is only offering “a possible way forward”⁹¹ and not a fully developed model. Liew offers a larger body of work on this topic and is more specific in his application. Samuel may resist concluding anything certain about Mark's portrayal of Jesus because of the many complexities of the text but his methodological approach lacks Liew's confidence and assertiveness. He emphasizes

⁸⁹ Ibid., 84f.

⁹⁰ Liew acknowledges that Bhabha's mimicry is a menace to the colonists as it creates some wiggle room between the colonized own traditions and the culture forced on them but problematizes it into an (un)conscious replication and duplication of colonial ideology that is “almost the same, but not quite.” See Liew, “Tyranny, Boundary and Might,” 12. See footnote 9. Also Liew, *Politics of Parousia*, 93-4, footnote 44.

⁹¹ Samuel, 76.

repeatedly that Jesus' role disrupts everything and everybody on both Roman and Jewish sides but lacks a close reading of much of the text. Samuel is so careful where he treads that he may run the risk of missing the forest for his feet.

In sum, I find Liew's work to be both theoretically sophisticated and comprehensive enough to warrant further consideration here. In the following chapter I examine Liew's work on postcolonialism and the gospel of Mark in greater detail. My goal is to examine closely his reading of Mark in order to glean clearer insight into the strengths and limits of postcolonial criticism of the gospel.

Chapter 4 – Tat-siong Benny Liew's Mark

Tat-Siong Benny Liew's work showing the “colonial mimetic discourse” present in Mark's gospel exemplifies Samuel's third model. Liew uses a modified version of Homi Bhabha's “colonial mimicry” to show Mark's Jesus as a new emperor coming to replace the existing political authorities. From this perspective, Mark's Jesus does not seek to dismantle imperialism, only to become the new emperor.

Liew does not spend significant time on the introduction of the gospel. I believe it is important to read the introduction closely before diving into Liew's interpretation. Mark's gospel opens with a definite perspective that colors the rest of the work. Once I have reviewed certain themes in the Markan prologue I will continue on to Liew's work explicitly.

Superscript (Un)Subtleties

Mark wastes no time in stating the purpose of his story. The superscript states: “The beginning of the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ, [the Son of God].”⁹² Rather than assuming that this is a theological statement concerning the status of Jesus as a heavenly figure, readers should consider the possibility that Mark's opening verse may be instead a heavily weighted political statement hinting to the purpose of Jesus under the oppression of the Roman empire. Ched Myers notes that the word “beginning” (*arche*) could be an allusion to the beginning of Genesis. Mark's narrative would then be the

⁹² The brackets indicate uncertainty as to the original inclusion of the phrase *'uios tou theo* in the gospel. Though the vast majority of manuscripts contain this qualifier, some have *kurios* instead and one of the oldest and most reliable extant manuscripts likely did not contain it.

start of a new salvation history for Israel, as Genesis was.⁹³ Beyond meaning “beginning,” *arche* can also mean “empire,” or “realm.”⁹⁴ Samuel notes that the Greek historian Polybius uses *arche*, to denote Rome’s *imperium* over the world “by a policy of aggrandizement and expansion.”⁹⁵ If *arche* is defined in terms of expansion then Jesus’ *arche* could represent a direct encroachment on Rome. If a first century reader read not only “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus” but also (or even primarily) “The empire [of the gospel] of Jesus” there would be an instant recognition of the political nature of Jesus’ legacy. To call a gospel of Jesus an *arche*, can come into direct conflict with Roman imperialism. Mark could have been using this word for this very reason, on the one hand escaping possible insurrectionist accusations while on the other hinting subversion. If Myers is correct, Mark sets the tone in the first sentence of the gospel as the beginning of a new empire.

The Greek for “good news” (or “gospel”) is *euaggelion* which is often translated appropriately enough as “good news.” Myers notes that the term was often associated with news of military victory.⁹⁶ J. Fears calls this political propoganda “imperial gospel,” promoting the imperial cult of the emperor. Caesar was raised to deific status by Augustus and legends surrounding him grew. The first *euaggelion* was the news of the birth of Caesar, the divine man. Samuel connects the gospel of Caesar's birth with the *arche* of a new Roman political history. Thus he interprets Caesar’s advent as *arche tou*

⁹³ Myers,, 122.

⁹⁴ Samuel, 90f.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁹⁶ Myers, 123.

*euaggeliou kaisarou 'uiou theou.*⁹⁷ According to Myers, “Mark is taking dead aim at Caesar and his legitimating myths.”⁹⁸ Myers continues to say that the good news of Mark is not victory by Roman’s armies, but “a declaration of war upon the political culture of the empire.”⁹⁹ Samuel also connects *arche* and *euaggelion* to Jewish tradition in the Septuagint. Isaiah declares good news of YHWH victoriously freeing his people from under the imperial reign of Persia.¹⁰⁰ It is not unreasonable that Mark could have made this connection, given that he immediately proceeds with a quotation from Isaiah.

This good news is not concerning just anyone, but Jesus *christos*, the anointed one. The concept of the anointed one of God is pervasive throughout the Hebrew scriptures and has its roots in the tumultuous political history of Israel. According to 1 Samuel 10.1, Samuel appointed Saul as the first king of Israel by anointing him with oil, saying “The Lord has anointed you ruler over his people Israel. You shall reign over the people of the Lord and you will save them from the hand of their enemies all around.” Calling Jesus the anointed is far from politically neutral in a Jewish context. For Jewish readers the anointed recalls the Israelite monarchy and the tradition that there will be another Messiah to liberate the Jewish people from the Roman empire. The ideology of the anointed one of God had long taken a departure from strictly monarchical usage. Isaiah 45.1 calls Cyrus God’s anointed “whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes.” Furthermore, in nonbiblical traditions, the anointed took on apocalyptic connotations. Samuel believes that the

⁹⁷ Samuel, 92.

⁹⁸ Myers, 124.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 124.

¹⁰⁰ Samuel, 93.

Qumran literature implies a belief in a divinely born messiah from 1QSa 11-12.¹⁰¹ The *Similitudes of Enoch* makes several references to a heavenly messianic figure that will lead Israel into a new age and the Jewish people to freedom.

The last part of Mark's introduction concerns the title "son of God." This also is at least as political as it is theological. Though the phrase may not belong in the original gospel, I will treat it here because it does appear as a theme later.¹⁰² The *'uiou tou theou* was not an unheard of phrase before Mark's narrative. As noted above, the Messiah had taken in some traditions a divine lineage. Though heavenly beings (Gen. 6.2, 4; Deut. 32.8; Ps. 29.1; Dan. 3.25) and people of Israel (Exod. 4.22; Jer. 31.20; Hos. 11.1; 2 Sam. 7.14; Ps. 2) are called sons of God in the biblical tradition, the son of God in the Roman imperial cult was the emperor Caesar himself. As legitimation for their rule, emperors claimed divine status as gods or sons of god. Ceremonies, games and other celebrations honored the emperors as receiving divine favor to rule the eternal Roman empire.¹⁰³ By claiming that Jesus is the son of God, Mark asserts either that the emperor is not God's son or that he is not the only "son of God."

This semantic strategy demonstrates the hybridity and mimicry present in a colonized society. Mark does not express an explicitly Jewish or Roman ideology but uses imagery and language from both to express deep sentiments towards them. The words should be familiar to Jews from the Hebrew Bible and the Gentiles accustomed to

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 94.

¹⁰² See Mark 1.11.

¹⁰³ Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 7-8, 83-6.

the imperial cult. Jesus signals the beginning of a new era of salvation to both colonist and colonized and also redraws the lines of power and authority to himself.

Introducing Prophetic Nature of Jesus and John

Immediately after introducing the gospel, Mark opens with a conflation of Malachi 3.1 and Isaiah 40.3 concerning a messenger who prepares the way of the Lord. This messenger is John the Baptist. Samuel considers this passage (Mark 1.2-8) to be a midrash.¹⁰⁴ The conflated quotation from the Hebrew Bible allows a continuum of tradition from the written word of the holy Scriptures in order to justify the claims about Jesus. Mark conflates these citations to show how Jesus' predecessor John flows out of the tradition while dialectically placing Jesus in the midst of that tradition.

The continuum Mark creates is not without its share of disruption. Samuel points out that conflating texts and reapplying their meaning cannot simply lead to a single meaning. It instead complicates the meaning of both texts. To some extent, this conflation can even undermine the earlier text's meaning: "To recognize that a text is related to another text is both to affirm and deny the earlier text."¹⁰⁵ In a sense, one text will always be interpreted in light of the other. Its meaning cannot be based strictly on its original placement in a passage. This both adds meaning and takes away meaning from each text. Furthermore, an exclusive midrash that relates directly to a single person, in this case John the Baptist, would no doubt clash with other contemporary Jewish interpretations. Mark's midrash is thus set over and above others in its application.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Samuel, 97.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 99.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 101.

Mark has John appearing in the wilderness, which also has many implications concerning the divine plan for the nation of Israel. Isaiah speaks of God doing something new, making a way in the wilderness, leading the chosen people out of exile back to Jerusalem (Is 40.3, 43.19). When the Hebrew people followed Moses out of Egyptian bondage they spent forty years in the wilderness where they were completely dependent on God. Jeremiah recalls the period as a honeymoon of God and his chosen people, (“I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness” (Jer 2.2)) as does Hosea (“Therefore, I will now allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her” (Hos 2.14)).¹⁰⁷ However it was because of Israel’s infidelity that God forsook them (Jer 2.5, 20, 3.2). Some biblical tradition promise that though God delivered Israel to “utter destruction” (Is 43.28) God will pour out his blessings on them and their descendants once again (Is 44.3).

The wilderness was a limbo between liberation and salvation. Though they were no longer enslaved to the Egyptians, they were not yet living in the promised land. The Jews' situation was paralleled to the Babylonian exile. Some Jews thought themselves still in the exile, due to the lack of independent rule even after their return from exile. The last lines of Isaiah name Israel’s state during or after the Babylonian exile in the wilderness (Is 64.10, Jer 9.12, 12.10). The control by foreign empires such as Persia, Greece and Rome left many Jews bitter. Some believed that God was going to bring them back out of the wilderness, back out of exile when he would conquer the foreign empire and establish again independent rule of Israel under the messiah.

¹⁰⁷ See also Hosea 9.10, 13.5.

John, coming out of the wilderness, proclaims repentance and forgiveness (Mk 1.4). John's appearance from the wilderness not only speaks of his ascetic nature but likely rings in the ears of a first century Jew as a promise of salvation from God spoken through the prophetic tradition. Now is the time for God's intervention in Israel's struggle against Roman oppression, for Jewish independence under the coming Messiah.

Tat-siong Benny Liew's Reading of Mark

As the opening of the gospel establishes itself as an authority sanctioned by its continuity with the Hebrew scriptures, so too does Mark's Jesus waste little time in displaying his power. Following the model of colonial mimicry exemplified by Tat-siong Benny Liew, Mark resists the colonial powers in a blatant way by establishing Jesus as the true emperor (dictator). As Samuel interprets Liew, Mark "[mimics] the Roman colonists by internalizing and duplicating their ideology of colonialism in order to continue its own brand of imperial tyranny, boundary and might."¹⁰⁸

Liew's interpretation of Mark is generated from a "[refusal] to idealize anything."¹⁰⁹ Liew believes that too many Markan interpreters (i.e. Ched Myers, Herman C. Waetjen and Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly) idealize a more liberative reading to characterize Mark as *anti-colonial* literature of resistance.¹¹⁰ By viewing Mark solely as a liberating document that attempts to disrupt and unravel the imperial schemes of domination and attack the complacency and collaboration of Jewish leaders, the reader idealizes the gospel in a positive way. However, Liew makes much of Homi Bhabha's

¹⁰⁸ Samuel, 79.

¹⁰⁹ Liew, "Tyranny, Boundary and Might," 9. Also "The Gospel of Mark," in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, 105.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

theory of colonial mimicry to show that Mark is not attempting to destroy the politics of empire but instead reestablishes an empire of preferred government.¹¹¹ Liew's postcolonial reading emphasizes negotiation over rejection, accommodation and ambivalence over nationalism and essentialism. Jesus replicates the power and authority of imperialism.

Jesus' authority is obvious in Mark. The first spoken line in the gospel is John's announcement "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy...I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the holy spirit" (Mk 1.7-8). The revered prophet who comes from the wilderness, of whom the Hebrew Scriptures prophesy, is not worthy to touch the dirty feet of Jesus. Jesus' authority is of a higher kind. Jesus teaches in the synagogue "as one having authority" and "not as the scribes" (Mk 1.22). Mark quickly differentiates Jesus from the existing powers of the scribes as a greater teacher. This new authority is demonstrated by the exorcism of a man in the synagogue (Mk 1.23-6). The crowds recognize this new authority of Jesus and follow him (Mk 1.27-8). The crowds choose Jesus' authority over the scribes. This disrupts the status quo. The Roman powers had no problem with the Jews following scribes and pharisees because the Romans know how little power they have. Furthermore, the existing Jewish authorities had power because the Romans endorsed them. If one came "as one having authority...not as the scribes" but greater, this could represent a threat. Rome needed to make sure the Jewish leaders would not encourage

¹¹¹ Ibid., 12-3.

their followers to rise up against the empire. They did not have this certainty with a new authoritative teacher. Existing imperial powers need the status quo to remain so.

Jesus' authority is furthermore set apart from the scribes when he heals the paralytic (Mk 2.1-12). The man is let down through the roof to Jesus and Jesus declares the man's sins forgiven. The implication here is that Jesus declares that God has forgiven the man's sins. The scribes (understandably) think it blasphemous. Jesus then reads their minds and proves he has the authority to forgive sins on earth by healing the man's paralysis. Again this set Jesus over and above the scribes in power and authority, both physically and spiritually, taking the allegiance of the people away from the Jewish leaders, or more importantly, away from those against Jesus. The Jewish leaders here are "outed."

Mark shows Jesus' authority on several levels, the first being scriptural. Aside from the continuity Mark establishes in his introduction, Jesus is shown as a kind of master scribe. Mark displays Jesus countering scribes with scripture in many instances. Jesus defends himself and the disciples from the Pharisees when they pick grain on the sabbath by referring to the story of David and his men eating holy bread set aside for YHWH in 1 Samuel 21.1-6. Jesus ends this confrontation by declaring the "son of man" as lord of the sabbath (Mk 2.23-8). "Son of man" here means both "humanity" in the sense of his previous statement that the sabbath was made for humankind, but also that Jesus himself as the son of man was something greater. Jesus shows his scriptural mastery elsewhere concerning his use of parables (Mk 4.10-2), cleanliness (Mk 7.1-8), divorce (Mk 10.2-12), eternal life (Mk 10.17-22), temple operation (Mk 11.15-7),

resurrection (Mk 12.18-27), the commandments (Mk 12.28-31), the davidic messiah (Mk 12.35-7) and the apocalypse (Mk 13.19-27). Liew points out that Mark shows the validity of Jesus' teachings by the positive reaction of the crowd in several of these circumstances.¹¹²

Liew shows that while Mark's Jesus is a sort of master scribe, he is even more so the fulfillment of scripture.¹¹³ Two scenes exemplify this, the first being the parable of the wicked tenants (Mk 12.1-11). Jesus represents the son and heir of the farmer/God. Just as the tenants rejected and killed the farmer's son, so will the Jewish authorities reject and kill Jesus, the son of God. Jesus becomes the rejected stone which becomes foundational to the plan of God (Ps 118.22-3). Saying the Jewish leaders are tenants is not an arbitrary metaphor. They are only temporary authorities playing the role of master only until the true master/lord returns to resume control of his land. The Romans, for the sake of peace, let the Jewish leaders control their land, but it is wrong of them to think that even the Romans are in ultimate power; it is God. Jesus, therefore, as the "heir" of God has more power and authority than either the Jewish leaders or the Romans. Jesus as fulfillment of the Jewish tradition means the end of their time as "tenants." This is a challenge to all other claims to power other than Jesus' own, Jewish or Roman, granted to him by God. The next scene is the "transfiguration" of Mark 9.2-13. Jesus went up on a mountain and there Peter James and John witnessed Jesus conversing with Moses and Elijah. Moses as the great law giver represents the law and Elijah the prophets.

Including Jesus with these two traditions shows the continuity of Judaism from the law

¹¹² Ibid., 14.

¹¹³ Ibid., 14-5.

through the prophets and finally to Jesus, the culmination and fulfillment of everything prior. Peter then asks permission to build three tents¹¹⁴ for them on the mountain. After this a cloud overshadows them and tells them to listen to Jesus, Moses and Elijah subsequently disappear. Liew argues that the command to listen not only refers to Peter's characteristic misunderstandings but to his assumption that Jesus is equal to Moses or Elijah.¹¹⁵ He shows Mark's Jesus as a greater law-giver and prophet than Moses or Elijah. As law-giver Jesus establishes a new covenant with his blood (Mk 14.24). Liew argues, following Tolbert, that Jesus' predictions concerning his passion (Mk 8.31, 9.31, 10.32-4), the colt he rides into town (Mk 11.1-6), the preparation of the passover meal (Mk 14.12-6) and his disciple's failures give Jesus the air of omniscience. This would then support Jesus' claims concerning apocalyptic predictions not fulfilled in the gospel itself. Liew even sees the possibility that Mark's Jesus is a greater king than David. Jesus teaches in the temple that David is not the son of God because David addresses God as "Lord" (*kurios*). Jesus, not David, is this son of God. Furthermore, as with the parable of the wicked tenants, the landowner had "one" other, a beloved son. To Liew, "This claim of singularity is...an effective ideological weapon that leads to absolutism by allowing no comparison or competition."¹¹⁶ Not even the Roman emperor is exempt from this attack.

¹¹⁴ The word here for "tent" (*skenas*) connects to the Hebrew *shaken*, or, "tabernacle" from the LXX. This same word John uses in his gospel to call Jesus the "tent" of the divine *logos*. As the tabernacle was God's presence on earth, so Moses, Elijah and Jesus are God's representatives on earth. Moses and Elijah disappeared on the mountain while Jesus remained, the live fulfillment of the previous ones.

¹¹⁵ Liew, "Tyranny," 15.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

Jesus' unique status affords him special privileges. Jesus has the authority to update or change tradition, to authorize new “laws” or to change his mind concerning his own demands. Jesus is above both Jewish law and Roman law. Liew notes Jesus' defense against fasting because of his status as the “bridegroom.”¹¹⁷ To Liew, Jesus is not consistent when he derides the Pharisees for exploiting widows (Mk 12.40-4), tells a rich man to give everything he owns to the poor (Mk 10.17-22) and sends his disciples out to minister with nothing but the shirt on their backs (Mk 6.7-13) on the one hand, then praises the woman in Bethany for spending a year's pay on expensive nard to dump on his head (Mk 14.3-9). He even scolds his disciples for thinking about the poor's need over Jesus'. Jesus also maligns the Pharisees for their hypocrisy of neglecting the commandment to honor one's parents by excuse of Corban (Mk 7.9-13) while he completely ignores his mother because of a higher priority to God (Mk 3.31-5). Jesus also forbids his disciples from preventing other exorcism performed in his name (Mk 9.38) but then warning about “false messiahs” who will lead others astray (Mk 13.22).

For Liew, all of the above evidences vertical power hierarchy that Mark reproduces, or “mimics,” in his gospel. Jesus treats his disciples as his servants. At the end of Jesus' apocalypse he sets himself up as the “lord of the house” who puts his “slaves” in charge and “commands” them tasks (Mk 13.34-7). For Mark to use the metaphor of the lord of a house also implies the threat of punishment to the “slaves” who did not follow orders. Mark's Jesus had earlier called the Gentile lords “tyrants” (*katexousiazousin*, Mk 10.41-5), but this is what Jesus himself is. Jesus specifies that this

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 17.

kind of power, though possessed by himself, “is not so among you” (Mk 10.43). Jesus' disciples have no claim to power or authority and the Gentiles are at fault in their hierarchy; only Jesus can be lord and master. Jesus alone can give “authority” (Mk 6.7), order (Mk 6.8) and command (Mk 8.15). His disciples are merely slaves to be ordered around. Liew notes Patrick Brantlinger in calling Jesus' disciples “virtually personified colonies.”¹¹⁸ Jesus ordered his disciples to get in a boat in which he then took a nap and scolded his disciples when they woke him (Mk 3.9, 4.37-40). When Jesus feeds five thousand his disciples are sent out to collect the food (Mk 6.38), seat the guests (Mk 6.39), serve the food (Mk 6.41), then dismissed (Mk 6.45). Jesus sends his disciples to bring Bartimaeus to him (Mk 10.49), to bring Jesus a colt and throw their coats over it for his comfort (Mk 11.1-7) and to prepare the passover meal (Mk 14.12-6). The willingness of the disciples to fulfill the roles of servants does not change their status as such.¹¹⁹

Liew briefly explores familial metaphors to further the position of power and authority he argues for Mark's Jesus.¹²⁰ He is aware that familial language can have oppressive connotations, especially in a patriarchal setting. Jesus speaks of a new family that will be given to those who leave “house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields,” but this new family leaves out “father” (Mk 10.30). Liew views this not as a “dismantling of authority or hierarchy.”¹²¹ To Liew, Mark's Jesus is the vessel through which all of God's authority and work is arbitrated and so long as Jesus sets the

¹¹⁸ Liew, “Tyranny,” 19. cf Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*.

¹¹⁹ For a dramatically different interpretation of power in Mark's gospel concerning this passage, see Alberto de Mingo Kaminouchi, *'But It Is Not So Among You': Echoes of Power in Mark 10.32-45*, (T & T Clark International: 2003, London).

¹²⁰ Liew, “Tyranny,” 20.

¹²¹ See Mark 8.38, 11.25, 13.32, 14.36.

rules for these “new families” he holds the power.¹²² Liew adds that the term “children” is occasionally employed as an ideal form for entering the kingdom of God.¹²³

Furthermore, this view of God or Jesus as a “father” disrupts the familiar familial Roman system in which the emperor is “father.” Jesus or God as “father” replaces the emperor in the new household, the kingdom of God. Jesus refers to the disciples and others as “sons of the bridegroom” (Mk 2.19) and children (Mk 7.27, 10.24). Liew states

Even if one understands 'children' as a symbol for something else (like those who occupy a marginal position in society), infantilization is still an insulting form of patronization at best, and an extreme form of victimization at worst.¹²⁴

Liew interprets Mark's Jesus to be reproducing the “insider-outsider binarism” of imperialism.¹²⁵ Though any ethnicity or cultural background may be welcomed “in,” Liew is clear in stating that the requirement is strictly one's positive response and affirmation of Jesus.¹²⁶ The “ins” can share in the kingdom under the authority of Jesus while the “outs” will be violently destroyed in the *parousia*. Jesus is clear that those who reject him will not be a part of the future kingdom (Mk 8.38, 12.7-11, 26-7). Jesus will save his elect, but the rest will not only be destroyed; they will suffer more than death for their sins. According to Liew, Jesus' attitude towards Judas would be that Judas would have been better off if he had never born and sinners are better off mutilating themselves than to be thrown into never ending fire (Mk 9.42-8). Liew sees this “serve or die”

¹²² Liew, “Tyranny,” 20.

¹²³ Ibid., 20-21. See Mark 9.36-7, 10.13-6.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 20-21.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 22.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 22.

attitude in Mark as a mimic of Roman imperialism.¹²⁷ Mark does not write against the imperial system at large, but only the authorities in the system. The true lord is Jesus. It is acceptable to be a slave to a greater master and it is normative for that master to take dictatorial control over all subjects, rewarding those who are obedient and punishing harshly those who rebel. This is not liberation, simply managerial restructuring.

Furthermore, the outsiders cannot claim ignorance as an excuse. Liew states:

This (non)choice is, in turn, based on another colonial rationalization that Mark shares: namely that certain people have proven to be too barbaric, too evil or too underdeveloped to be given autonomy, or even the right to live.¹²⁸

Mark's Jesus is again re-producing the colonial insider-outsider binarism that ultimately results in the utter destruction of the outsider. Those that do not want to share this fate must become insiders by responding to the new lord Jesus positively.

Mark and Power

Just as it is for Rome, Mark's bottom line is power. Liew reads the introduction to Jesus' ministry as evidence.¹²⁹ Jesus' first action in Mark is teaching in a synagogue and exorcising an unclean spirit (Mk 1.21-8). The message of Jesus' teaching is absent. Though the crowd is impressed by Jesus' words, the passage illustrates the power Jesus has over the unclean spirit. The response to Jesus is also framed in terms of his power more than his ability as a teacher (Mk 1.27). Liew suggests that the actual subject of Jesus' teaching is his power and authority. This is shown again in Jesus' healing of the paralytic (Mk 2.3-12). Jesus was speaking to a crowd, though again the message is

¹²⁷ Ibid., 23.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 23.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 24.

absent. When the paralytic is brought down through the roof, Jesus uses the opportunity to speak not only about forgiveness, but about his authority to grant forgiveness. This message is not an edifying moral lesson, it is to show that Jesus yet again has a higher authority and great power. Even the Baptist's words about his unworthiness to tie Jesus' sandals is prefaced by a claim about Jesus' power (Mk 1.7-8). When people in Jesus' hometown question his "deeds of power" because of his humble beginnings (Mk 6.2-3), Liew interprets that to mean those without authority have no real power.¹³⁰

Since Mark often writes of the crowd's positive reactions to Jesus' displays of power, the gospel continually emphasizes the relationship between authority and power. Jesus' humiliating death, however, does not change Mark's view. Jesus' death will be countered by the *parousia*. The brutal crucifixion will be vindicated by Jesus' equally brutal annihilation of those "outsiders" (Mk 4.24, 14.21). To Liew, "Authority is (over)power(ing)" and "vindication must become vindictive."¹³¹ Jesus' suffering can may not be taken into sufficient account in Liew's analysis. To Liew, Jesus' crucifixion only justifies his vindictive and vengeful return. Mark thus demonstrates the same "might-is-right" attitude that perpetuates insider-outsider binarisms and the tyrannical colonial coercive politic.

Apocalypse and Time

Eight years after Liew published his article "Tyranny, Boundary and Might" he again opened discussion of Mark in a chapter in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New*

¹³⁰ Ibid., 25-6.

¹³¹ Ibid., 26.

Testament Writings.¹³² In this recent work, Liew maintains a mimetic approach to Mark, however he interprets the gospel with an apocalyptic awareness. Liew expands on his earlier article by discussing Mark's chronology as an apocalyptic discourse in authority, agency and gender.¹³³ He views the coming kingdom as an assault on the empire of Satan.

Authority

Liew shows that Jesus is more than a superior authority; he argues that Jesus' activity opposes the scribes and Pharisees. Mark shows the Jewish authorities in collaboration with Rome, further showing the Satanic connections attributed to the existing Roman/Jewish leaders. Jesus proceeds immediately after his baptism into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan with wild beasts (Mk 1.12-3). His first action in public ministry is exorcising an unclean spirit (Mk 1.23-6). Soon the crowd brings to him "all who were sick or possessed with demons...And [Jesus] cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak" (Mk 1.32-4). Jesus then "went throughout Galilee...casting out demons" (Mk 1.39). This illustrates what Liew identifies as Jesus' "aggressive assault on Satan."¹³⁴ The scribes and the Pharisees are not present in these first events. Jesus' controversies with the Jewish authorities begin in Mark 2.¹³⁵ At first, the scribes question Jesus' authority to forgive sins. It then escalates to accusations concerning his company (Mk 2.15-7), legal charges (Mk 2.18-20, 2.23-8) and finally they plot to kill him (Mk 3.1-6). As Liew states, "Mark expands Jesus' opponents to include

¹³² Fernando F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah, 2007.

¹³³ Liew, "The Gospel of Mark," 106.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 106.

¹³⁵ Mark 2.1-3.6.

various factions of the Jewish leadership and escalates their problem from one of weakness to one of wickedness.”¹³⁶ Jesus' antagonist shifts from the demonic army of Satan to Jewish leadership of scribes and Pharisees. This association between the Jewish leaders and the army of Satan is not an exception to the way Mark's Jesus reacts to them.

When the Jewish “authorities” question Jesus later in chapter 11, Jesus' response is a counter question that reveals the “human origin” of the Jewish leaders' authority (Mk 11.27-33). Jesus then exposes their motives in the parable of the wicked tenants. Jesus exposes the leaders as “usurpers and murderers” who will receive their just reward when the master returns.¹³⁷ Liew goes further still to argue that Mark traces the origin of the Jewish leaders' opposition to Satan.¹³⁸ After Mark reveals the Pharisees' plot to kill Jesus the scribes accuse him of having Beelzebul in him (Mk 3.22). It is not Beelzebul that is in Jesus, but rather the spirit which came down like a dove at his baptism (Mk 1.10). Jesus responds to the scribes by saying that a house cannot stand divided and to plunder the house of the strong man one must first bind the strong man (Mk 3.23-7). Liew sees Jesus as enacting this parable in the cleansing of the temple.¹³⁹ As Satan's house will be plundered, so too does Jesus plunder the house of God which had become a den of robbers (Mk 11.15-7). Furthermore, Jesus concludes his response by convicting the scribes for the unforgivable sin of blaspheming the holy spirit (Mk 3.28-30).

Given the Liew interpretation, it appears that Mark's Jesus is grouping all the opposing authorities together. This group consists of Roman authorities, Jewish

¹³⁶ Liew, “The Gospel of Mark,” 107.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 107.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 107-8.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 107-8.

authorities, and Satan's army. By exposing the Jewish leaders' origin as not from God, by extension it becomes Satanic. Jesus' early ministry consists of exorcising demons and healing paralytics. Being possessed by a demon could reflect Mark's attitude of colonialism. Jesus burst onto the scene and begins throwing demons out of people. The possessed are spiritually subdued by Satan's hordes as the people are physically and economically subdued by the Roman hordes. When Jesus arrived in Gerasene country he finds a man possessed by "Legion," a Roman military term. Jesus proceeds to command the demon to come out and enter into a herd of swine, unclean animals, who then run into the sea, drowning as did Pharaoh's army in pursuit of the Hebrews escaping Egyptian dominion. The people are possessed by the Satanic army of Rome while crippled by the oppressive Jewish authorities.¹⁴⁰ All outsiders are under the evil control of Satan's army which Jesus will destroy in the reestablishment of his own legitimate rule.

Liew defends this reading due to similar language in both Jesus' response to the Pharisees and the temple incident.¹⁴¹ Just as Satan's "house" is "entered," he "enters" the temple which was the "house" of God. As Jesus "drives out" demons so does he "drive out" buyers and sellers in the temple. Satan's "goods" are "plundered" and Jesus "overturns" tables of "goods." Liew suggests that Jesus' parable of the seeds (Mk 4.2-8) designates the Jewish leaders as the ground from which the gospel seeds are snatched up by Satan.¹⁴² They charged Jesus with blasphemy from the start and Jesus' first experience

¹⁴⁰ See Myers, *Binding the Strong Man* and Herman C. Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power* for further connections between the Roman Legions and the Gerasene demon.

¹⁴¹ Liew, "The Gospel of Mark," 107.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 108.

in the synagogue results in an exorcism, pointing again to the demonic presence within the synagogue.

The Jewish leaders are not, however, the only target of Mark's polemic. Jesus condemns the Roman authorities, although such criticism is less explicit because of the elsewhere attested practice of avoiding direct criticism of those in political power.¹⁴³ When Jesus scolds James and John after they ask to sit next to him in his glory, he tells them it is the Romans (Gentile lords) who deal in that system of hierarchy and oppression (Mk 10.35-45). This is immediately following Jesus' prediction that it is the Romans (not the Jews) who will “mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him” (Mk 10.34). The Romans then do just that. Liew suggests that Mark details these activities to emphasize that the soldiers are going above and beyond the call of duty to torture and humiliate Jesus.¹⁴⁴ In Jesus' “apocalyptic discourse” (Mk 13.9) the disciples will face councils, synagogues, governors and kings (two Jewish authorities and two Roman authorities). There is also the parable of the wicked tenants, where the Romans are as much to blame as the Jews, though not as explicitly noted. Liew sees anti-Roman rhetoric in the passage immediately following the parable.¹⁴⁵ Jesus is asked whether taxes to the emperor are lawful and Jesus' famous answer, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's,” indicts the Romans as

¹⁴³ Liew, *Politics of Parousia: Reading Mark Inter(con)textually*, 85. Liew explains that ancient apocalyptic literature tended to attack more benign targets rather than the actual imperialists in the interests of self-preservation. See also Liew, “The Gospel of Mark” in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, 109-10; Tolbert, “When Resistance Becomes Repression,” 336; Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 186.

¹⁴⁴ Liew, *Politics of Parousia*, 83.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

fellow wicked tenants who do not give the lord of the vineyard his share of the crop (Mk 12.13-7).

The text's anti-Roman polemic can also be detected in the parallels between Jesus' trial and the Baptist's execution (Mk 6.14-29). Both Jesus and the Baptist are men from God who proclaim the coming of God to the masses. John baptizes with water, Jesus with fire. Herod, the Jewish "king," is "perplexed" by John and liked listening to him but was forced to behead him by making a drunken unconditional promise to his wife's daughter. Pilate is "amazed" by Jesus' silence (Mk 15.5) and realizes that the accusations against Jesus are false (Mk 15.10). Both authorities are impressed by the accused and have them executed out of social obligation.

At once these authorities are seen as reluctant and weak. This could be seen as a way of removing blame from them but Liew sees differently. Pilate still has Jesus scourged and the manner in which this is done resembles the beating the Jewish authorities gave him in front of the high priest. Mark writes "All of them condemned him as deserving death" and the Jews and the guards both take turns beating him. This is the same immediately preceding his crucifixion (Mk 14.64-5, 15.17-9). Liew sees anti-Roman critique in the parallels Mark draws between the questioning of Jesus by the high priest and that by Pilate. They both ask Jesus two questions. Jesus responds to the second question the high priest asks and to the first question that Pilate poses (Mk 14.60-2, 15.2-5). The Jews and the Romans are equally guilty and equally willing to collaborate against Jesus and against God.

I would like to emphasize several key points before concluding. Liew's version of postcolonial criticism has consistently stressed Mark's (un)conscious displacement of Caesar and the Roman empire with Jesus and the kingdom of God, respectively.¹⁴⁶ Jesus is not represented as an apolitical preacher of some all-inclusive love-centered social gospel but as a shrewd and powerful tyrant of God coming to enslave his followers to the true Emperor of the universe by the same imperial system of serve-or-be-destroyed. Equally important, however, is to realize that this is not because Mark intentionally desires this political system over another, but because it is the only model known to first century colonized natives; it is a reaction. Mark accepts the basic tenets of imperialism as normative. The issue is not then how power is held but who holds it. To Mark, the only acceptable being is Jesus. Jesus alone can wield the authority to decide who is “in” and who is “out.”

What Liew argues primarily is not that Mark's Jesus was a tyrant but that Mark's representation of Jesus reflects the need of the author to create that “interstitial space” where he or she could be something other than “other.” The need to be “in” instead of “out” is a key feature of Liew's presentation. A positive and affirming response to Jesus' divine power and authority takes priority. A rejecting and negative response results in utter annihilation. At last Mark is “in,” the Roman empire is “out” and will be destroyed.

¹⁴⁶ See Liew, “Tyranny, Boundary and Might,” 1999; *Politics of Parousia*, 1999; “The Gospel of Mark” in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, 2007 for the development and expansion of this methodology.

Conclusion

What Liew ultimately wants to ask the reader is how this reading of Mark affects the way we (personally and socially) think about the idea of “liberation” and “hybridity.”¹⁴⁷ What kind of freedom does “liberation” imply? Liberation itself connotes a rich history of ideological and physical struggle. Contemporary readers cannot read of “liberation” without associating events such as the French Revolution, abolition of slavery, women's suffrage or Indian independence. This is the kind of “idealizing” Liew wants to avoid in the gospel. Ideological postcolonialism as distinguished from temporal post-colonialism may take a radically different form. For Mark, that form may consist of promoting a new allegiance to a greater power. “Hybridity,” to Liew, is not liberation, it is (un)conscious internalization of a different culture to create an in-between state of almost the same, “but not quite.” For Mark, this hybridity is exposed with the ambivalence in which Jesus is both extremely anti-colonial to the Romans but in fact very imperial in his own lordship in the kingdom of God. He at once rejects the Roman and Jewish authority that has crippled the nation of Israel and yet announces destruction to those he considers outsiders to his new empire. Jesus' (Mark's) hybridity allows for both of these to happen simultaneously: violent rejection existing authority and forceful asserted servitude.

¹⁴⁷ Liew, *The Gospel of Mark*, 131.

Chapter 5 – Postcolonialism As One of the Many

Postcolonial criticism of the New Testament literature, in this case the gospel of Mark, can lead to fascinating and insightful conclusions concerning how power was used by first century Christians. In the case of Mark, postcolonial criticism examines the ways the author uses power to create a new space free of oppression and marginalization. Postcolonial criticism asks questions other methodologies do not concerning the use of power and imperial themes within the gospel.

Methodology and Meaning Making

One thing that needs to be reiterated and made clear is that the term “postcolonialism” is a tenuous one. As we have seen, many who consider themselves doing “postcolonial criticism” disagree on the extent to which the term applies and do their work in differing, sometimes contradicting, manners. Furthermore, some scholars such as Richard Horsley or Warren Carter may use many of the themes and methods of postcolonialism and never label them “postcolonial.”¹⁴⁸ Therefore, the question “Does it work?” cannot be answered concretely due to the inability to clearly define “it.”

What is important is that scholars do define the methodologies with which they are working. That is not to say that all scholarship need be neatly categorized into an existing methodology. Historical studies of any kind are fluid; they do not conform to

¹⁴⁸ See Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2006) or Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*.

only one or two labels but flow freely among many. The scholar must recognize that he or she is not merely writing for an audience of readers but that they are themselves readers in their act of interpreting, internalizing and producing.

Part of appreciating the complexity and permeability of research and bias is being as clear as possible about not only what the scholar is doing but how the scholar is doing it. If the scholar is not honest with him or herself then he or she will not be honest with the readers. This is not a statement concerning postcolonialism but about scholarship in general. Postcolonialism is a tool that some scholars use to get them somewhere. Whether or not it “works” is dependent upon how the scholar uses it and how they define it. One could hit a nail into a board using a crowbar but most would suggest using a hammer. The crowbar would get the job done, but would it be the most efficient way of doing it? Would a hammer not be faster or more accurate? Is there less of a risk of injury to the person, the nail or the board? What advocates of postcolonial criticism claim to offer is the hammer. If the scholar wants to research the relationship between imperial authorities and colonized natives then postcolonialism may be the most efficient tool for the task.

Even though most set out to research a conclusion they already know they will probably make, the process of figuring out how to get there can often be more elusive than the destination itself. Writing a general commentary on a book or an exegesis on a passage may not lend itself to one particular methodology. The scholar might simply ask “What does this mean?” This, however, does not quite capture the reality of the situation. Ultimately the scholar is asking “What does this mean to me?” Even if attempting to set

the text in an ancient historical context, perhaps the best the scholar could ask is “What do I think this meant to them?” The scholar always becomes the medium for the information. The text does nothing itself; the scholar chooses how to read it. Now it has come full circle. Texts do not tell scholars how to interpret them. Scholars choose what kind of interpretation is the most meaningful to them.

Attributing meaning to a text is the very act interpretation. The emphasis here is on the “act” of the interpreter. To use Dale Martin's phrase, “Texts don't mean. People mean with texts.”¹⁴⁹ To apply a certain methodology to a text is making the assumption that the reader will produce more meaning for the text than without this methodology. Using postcolonialism may give a reader a more useful tool than other methodologies may have to offer for certain texts. This is the case only if the scholar wishes to explore that specific aspect of a text.

It is not that the argument here is for readings meaning into text as opposed to exegesis but that there is ultimately a false dichotomy between these two ways. There is no such thing as pulling meaning out of a text, but we create boundaries for putting meaning into texts by our choice of methodology. Scholars choose the lens by which they read and as Robert W. Funk has said, “Methodology is not an indifferent net – it catches what it intends to catch.”¹⁵⁰

The boundaries of this “net” are therefore set to what is considered reasonable by the scholar and his or her peers in the academic and popular community. Interpretations

¹⁴⁹ Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 1.

¹⁵⁰ Robert W. Funk, “Beyond Criticism in Quest of Literacy: The Parable of the Leaven,” *Interpretation* 25 (1971), 151.

are constantly being read and critiqued by others. In the most optimistic light the hope could be to reach some ultimate truth or meaning in the text for humanity now and humanity in the ancient world; the text connects the two. What scholars have to offer one another are differing opinions, educations, biases and preferred methodologies. Through this endless process of critique methods are adjusted, adopted or dismissed based on their effectiveness. To date many scholars have found postcolonial criticism to be a valuable tool for understanding how a culture negotiates its imperial environment.

In the Bakhtinian dialogic the texts scholars write about are not unaffected by their interpretation. Just as the ideas of one scholar may be altered by the critique of another, the meaning of any text is never finalized. Every word, written or spoken, only exists in relation to itself in history; past and present.¹⁵¹ As such the meaning of the gospel of Mark changes every time it is interpreted. Those who want to “arrest the play of interpretation,” are either presumptuous or “politically tyrannical.”¹⁵² Interpretation yields interpretation. In this way the meaning of the gospel of Mark is not fixed but changes with each interpretation. The letters of the text may not change, but everything they represent is in constant flux. So too should be the work of scholars. In this way it becomes impossible for any scholar to have the final say of interpretation, no monopoly on meaning can ever exist.

Something this study has not shown or tried to prove is that postcolonial criticism is the best way to interpret biblical texts. It has only tried to show that this way of

¹⁵¹ Newsom, Carol A., “Bakhtin,” *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (Chalice Press: St. Louis, MO, 2000), 25.

¹⁵² David W. Odell-Scott, “deconstruction,” in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, edited by A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2000), 59.

interpreting the text can highlight certain aspects of texts concerning power dynamics between imperial and native authorities. Every aspect of the text has not been displayed because some fall outside the concern of postcolonialism. This study has shown a form of literary criticism as opposed to a more historical-critical methodology. For this reason no attention was given to source critical concerns such as a separate passion narrative or an added apocalyptic discourse. This does not mean that those kinds of criticisms could not be very helpful in understanding certain historical aspects of the text, just that they were not of concern in this case. The only responsible way of doing a total general interpretation would be to apply several methodologies that each ask different kinds of questions. Postcolonial criticism specifically asks questions concerning imperialism and colonization, so those are the aspects of the text that they will find meaning in.

Methodological Alternatives

To show how postcolonial criticism “catches what it intends to catch” a few examples of other methodologies will be briefly examined in relation to the gospel of Mark. These methods will be juxtaposed with postcolonialism to show by contrast what postcolonialism does not do.

The first to be discussed is narrative criticism. Narrative criticism, as defined by Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, grew out of the “New Criticism” of literary studies of the 1940s and structuralism.¹⁵³ Malbon discusses the need to view texts diachronically, from

¹⁵³ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?” in *Mark & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies, 2nd Edition*, ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2008), 29.

beginning to end, and synchronically, as if everything happens at the same time.¹⁵⁴

Diachronically the text must be interpreted in terms of the order of events and their significance, whereas a synchronic examination requires observing categories such as good, evil, chaos, etc. and how these themes relate to each other. The emphasis throughout is on the text itself. While historical information may enlighten some aspects of the text, narrative criticism reads the text on its own terms, using information given to the reader from the text itself.

An important concept to understand in narrative criticism is the idea of “implied author” and “implied reader.” Whereas a historical critic would ask questions about the “real author” such as when and where they lived, what historical events influenced them; the “real” flesh and blood writer. The implied author is the author the story itself implies. For example, the gospel of Mark quotes passages from the Septuagint, therefore the implied author had knowledge of that text. Making speculations about whether the author ever knew the disciple Peter and whether he or she was a contemporary to Jesus are directed towards the “real” author, as the implied author of the text mentions nothing of the sort. The implied reader is likewise not the first century flesh and blood readers of the text but the reader implied by the text. The use of the Septuagint in Mark implies that the reader would have held the Jewish scriptures as authoritative or sacred. Figuring out if Mark was written in Syria and how the Syrian Jews felt about the temple or the Roman empire are questions concerning the “real” readers, not the implied readers. This distinction between “real” and “implied” are important because of the priority of the text.

¹⁵⁴ Malbon, 31.

Narrative criticism reads the text on the text's terms. Any outside information is extraneous to this methodology.

An important element of this methodology is that it does not ask “what” the text means, but “how” it means. To give an example, it has been long noted how Mark has a sense of urgency by the repeated use of the word *euthus* (immediately). In the first eight chapters, this immediacy permeates much of the story, telling the reader what is going on is important now. The kingdom of God is coming now and now is the time to accept the message of Jesus. The second half of the gospel takes place almost tediously. Malbon uses the example of modern film makers using slow motion to signify profound moments.¹⁵⁵ In another sense of immediacy the implied author is urging the reader to understand and take in the events of Jesus' last week. This is not telling the reader what to read, but how to read.

To use a specific example, in Mark 4.35-40 Jesus and his disciples are in the boat on the sea of Galilee when a great storm overtakes them and the disciples fear for their lives while Jesus sleeps. That the disciples cry out to Jesus for help shows that they assume he can do something, though their surprise and “awe” shows that they did not know quite how Jesus could have helped. Malbon notes the relevance of psalm 107 where “some” in a storm cry out to YHWH and the storm was stilled. The sea has often been the site where God's power is manifested. God's power is Jesus' power. When the disciples ask who this is who can command the wind and sea the implied author is asking the implied reader to come into the story and ask themselves who Jesus is. Malbon states

¹⁵⁵ Malbon, 38.

“The implied author seems to know that a conclusion the implied reader must work to arrive at will be held more strongly.”¹⁵⁶ By not giving all the information right away the implied author is compelling the implied reader to discover the truth the gospel claims: Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord from a postcolonial perspective as well but, as has been shown, it is more important that the reader know of Jesus' dominating power than simply his status as “Lord.”

Not unlike narrative criticism, reader-response¹⁵⁷ criticism does not ask historical questions concerning the “real” author of text, nor does it explore more textually technical aspects such as form criticism or source criticism. It takes the text as it is. The difference between the two is that the emphasis of reader-response criticism is how the the reader of the text (both ancient and contemporary) react to the text's style or imperfections. For example, Robert M. Fowler examines the practice of “filling gaps” that readers employ on a regular basis to smooth out the vacancies in the story that may not be specific enough.¹⁵⁸ Fowler uses the examples of Matthew and Luke, showing that they filled gaps in Mark's story by elaboration. Mark 3.6 states the Pharisees' plot to kill Jesus and 3.7 shows Jesus departing to the sea. Matthew bridges these two verses by making the former cause for the latter. Jesus knew of the plot so he left (Mt 12.15).

Another example of how reader-response criticism functions is in the interpretation of irony. Fowler notes the scene of Jesus being mocked on the cross.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Malbon, 44-5.

¹⁵⁷ Reader-response criticism attributed to Wolfgang Iser.

¹⁵⁸ Robert M. Fowler, “Reader-Response Criticism: Figuring Mark's Reader,” in *Mark & Method*, 70.

¹⁵⁹ Fowler, 75-6.

The chief priests and the scribes say to Jesus “Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe” (Mk 15.32). The reader knows that because they were mocking Jesus they did not actually believe Jesus was the Messiah. The dramatic irony at play here is that the reader knows that Jesus really is the Messiah, the king of Israel. This text affirms to the reader that Jesus is the Messiah, otherwise the reader is aligned with the mockers who crucified him. Furthermore, it makes the reader ask “Why *doesn't* he come down?” Also, the mockers say “so that we may *see* and *believe*” (emphasis added). The chief priests and scribes connect seeing with believing, as did the Pharisees when they asked for a sign from Jesus (Mk 8.11-3). The disciples had seen Jesus' power in many ways such as two miraculous feedings, walking on water, raising the dead, healing the blind and exorcizing demons, yet they continually struggle with faith and ultimately abandoned Jesus to die. The Jewish authorities continually ask for signs in order to believe, yet Jesus does not humor them. Where then does the reader reside? Do they align with the Jewish authorities? the ignorant disciples? The reader must have the faith without sight, and understanding for what they have read. They must look and perceive, listen and understand (Mk 4.12).

Reader-response criticism, like narrative criticism, is a shift away from what the text means to how the text means. While the reader may be compelled to respond in certain ways to the format of the text, postcolonial criticism does not explore this as much. Postcolonialism may not address what effect on the reader the device of repetition has concerning the two feeding stories. Reader-response criticism may ask the reader to think about the irony of mockingly calling the crucified Jesus “Messiah” postcolonial

criticism wants to explore the relationship among the Jewish leaders acting as imperial puppets to execute a perceived political threat in Roman fashion while unknowingly correctly denoting Jesus as their own true emperor. Postcolonial criticism is not restricted from probing irony but if it does it will undoubtedly wander out of its native territory into other methodologies.

Deconstruction can bring us closer to postcolonial criticism than the two methodologies above. In Derrida's early deconstruction a main idea was to expose thematic hierarchical binaries such as speech/text, male/female, insider/outsider or good/evil as false dichotomies ultimately reliant on each other and categorically unstable. Stephen D. Moore uses the example of insider/outsider in relation to Mark's Jesus' use of parables as means of inclusion and exclusion.¹⁶⁰

To Moore, Jesus defines "insider" and "outsider" by response to parables; those who both "listen" and "understand" (Mk 4.12). To Jesus then, understanding his parables makes one an insider. The problem is that his disciples, those who are as inside as one could be, never seem to understand. Mark 4.33-4 remarks

With many such parables [Jesus] spoke the word to [the disciples], as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Insiders are created when Jesus' parables are understood and he explains "everything" to his disciples in private, off stage from the narrative. Jesus' three passion predictions do not seem explained nonetheless. The disciples continually respond to these the wrong way. After the first prediction Peter calls Jesus aside and rebukes him, to which Jesus

¹⁶⁰ Stephen D. Moore, "Deconstructive Criticism: Turning Mark Inside-Out," in *Mark & Method*, 96.

calls him Satan (Mk 8.31-3). The second time the disciples “did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him” (Mk 9.30-2). The third time James and John ask for priority seating in the kingdom of God, claiming they too can drink the cup Jesus drinks. Jesus tells them they do not understand again what he is talking about and the disciples became angry concerning the request of James and John (Mk 10.32-45). It is clear in the text that the disciples, insiders they may be, do not understand Jesus.

What really throws a wrench into this binarism is when Jesus finally dies on the cross as he predicted, the centurion who witnessed it says “Truly this man was God's Son!” (Mk 15.39). It seems that here the extreme outsider, a gentile directly involved in the physical abuse and execution of Jesus, seems to understand the paradoxical truth of Jesus' divine agency in the tortuous death when Jesus' own disciples fled in fear and misunderstanding.

That this insider/outsider binarism breaks down is the function of deconstruction, to demonstrate that the membrane separating the two terms of the opposition is necessarily porous or permeable. Each of the two terms is always surreptitiously overflowing the boundaries assigned to it and leaking into its neighbor.¹⁶¹

This could have implications to Liew's model of postcolonialism. The imperial/native binarism so explored in chapter four could face deconstructive destruction. It is not that postcolonial criticism is defeated by deconstruction as if in a methodological game of rock-paper-scissors but that deconstruction is a methodology that requires by definition the breakdown of binarisms into their parts to be examined and assessed. Deconstruction has its place so long as the scholar does not miss the forest for the trees.

¹⁶¹ Moore, 99.

Feminist criticism is very much in a similar vein as postcolonial criticism as it also seeks to examine the text from a dominated paradigm, the point of view of women. Whereas postcolonialism exploits the power struggle between imperial authority and the colonized natives, feminism's struggle is between men and women. Janice Capel Anderson explores the scene of Herodias and her dancing daughter in Mark 6.14-29 as a feminist interpreter.¹⁶²

This familiar story begins with Herod hearing of Jesus and fearing it is John the Baptist come back to life. Herod's new wife Herodias wanted the baptist dead for speaking out against their marriage but Herod feared John's influence with the people. Finally, at a banquet Herodias' daughter dances for Herod and he was so pleased that he offered her any gift up to half of his kingdom. Herodias then influenced her daughter to ask for John's head, which was carried out by Herod's soldier immediately. This story has already been discussed from a postcolonial point of view above but aspects of gender and sex were not thoroughly explored.

Anderson's goal in examining this passage is to “re-place the story in the context of the Gospel of Mark and its construction of male and female gender.”¹⁶³ Anderson means “gender” as in

the social construction of biological sex...Women and men are born with different sexual organs. Different social groups assign different meanings to these sexual differences. They define what it means to be masculine or feminine and the relationships between genders.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Janice Capel Anderson, “Feminist Criticism: The Dancing Daughter,” in *Mark & Method*, 111.

¹⁶³ Anderson, 125.

¹⁶⁴ Anderson, 112.

She will therefore examine what social structures of gender are shown in Mark to understand further what power/gender struggles are at play.

Though the interpretation of the dance could possibly be of innocence manipulated by a corrupt mother, typically the dance is viewed as an erotic seduction of Herod. One of the reasons is the extravagant offer made following the dance. Herod offers the girl “even half of my kingdom” (Mk 6.23). What could possibly make a King offer such a gift other than a sexual performance? This, of course, is making the assumption that a queen's daughter is a sexually enticing object of desire. There is also a connection with the kind of pleasure the king feels towards the dance. The *korasion* (Greek, girl) links Herodias' daughter to Esther (Est 2.7, 9). The Greek *areskō* Mark employs is also the term used in Esther when King Ahasuerus views her physical beauty and selects her to be his queen (Est 2.9). Furthermore, the offer of half the kingdom is the same offer King Ahasuerus gives Esther repeatedly (Est 5.3, 6, 7.2). It is therefore likely that Mark had Esther in mind during this passage, making sexual undertones likely.

To Anderson, asking for John's head is a form of castration.¹⁶⁵ The head, often a phallic symbol, represents personhood, power and masculinity. Herodias receiving John's head on a platter is a way for her to control him, to feminize him, removing his masculine autonomy to be served on a platter as if food for the banquet. John, like Jesus, becomes the food, bled to be fed. As Jesus' body was given symbolically at the last supper then literally on the cross, John's head was given up on a plate. Anderson compares these to the bleeding and feeding of women. She writes:

¹⁶⁵ Anderson, 133.

John, become food, is a type of Jesus, who will soon give his body to be eaten. But Jesus himself, in feeding the multitude, also prefigures his self-giving. As...the women who follow Jesus *serve*, so, too, Jesus serves. Jesus' own body is offered as nourishment – like that of a mother. So, too, is John's...Jesus and John are female. They are sources of food who bleed and feed just as women bleed and feed.¹⁶⁶

To Anderson, this process of gender border-crossing by Jesus and John disrupts constructs of masculinity and femininity. This challenge can lead to empowering by recognizing the feminine roles taken on by powerful figures such as Jesus and John. Jesus and John are powerful and male, but that power does not have to be exclusively masculine.

Conclusion

This study set out to review postcolonial criticism in contemporary biblical studies and ultimately ask “Is it worth it?” The methodology, though relatively new, has its roots in biblical and cultural studies from the 1980s, 70s and 60s in the work of scholars such as Mary Ann Tolbert, Ched Myers, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Edward Said and Jacques Derrida. Postcolonial theory branches out to historical studies, deconstruction, social studies as well as a number of literary criticisms. It is fluid and cross-disciplinary, accessible to the historian, biblical critic and literary theorist alike.

Postcolonial criticism is diverse; it can take a number of different, sometimes contradictory forms. This does not speak towards ineffectiveness but towards malleability. The form it will take is shaped by the interpretation of the reader, as is any methodology. Postcolonial criticism can be self-critical and self-correcting, guided by the reader as much (if not more so) by the reader.

¹⁶⁶ Anderson, 140.

Postcolonial criticism does serve best a reader wishing to exploit in a text how power is negotiated by hierarchical societies. There is never truly a one-way flow of power and domination; it is a transaction through the liminal interstitial space created out of necessity by the people on either side of the permeable membrane that separates those who have power and those who do not. In this ideological domain of in-betweenness there are social and political struggles that take place in literary and cultural texts produced by both sides. Scholars using postcolonial theory strive to pull this struggle to the fore, all the while (un)intentionally laying their own layer of bias over it. As shown above, postcolonial criticism does not hold a monopoly on this space but contributes a different interpretive tool to contemporary biblical studies.

It is my hope that postcolonial theory continues to inform scholarship as it has over the past couple decades. It will only prove to be effective, however, if being corrective precedes correction as scholars move further beyond today's methodological ventures. As Adolf von Harnack's prophetic words spoke over a century ago so do they today:

I imagine that a few hundred years hence there will be found to exist in the intellectual ideas which we shall have left behind us much that is contradictory; people will wonder how we put up with it. They will find much hard and dry husk in what we took for the kernel; they will be unable to understand how we could be so short-sighted, and fail to get a sound grasp of what was essential and separate it from the rest. Some day the knife will be applied and pieces will be cut away where as yet we do not feel the slightest inclination to distinguish. Let us hope that then we may find fair judges, who will measure our ideas not by what we have unwittingly taken over from tradition and are neither able nor called upon to correct, but by what was born of our very own, by the changes and

improvements which we have effected in what was handed down to us or was commonly prevalent in our day.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Adolf von Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* translated by Thomas Bailey Saunders (Philadelphia, PA: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 55.

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Curriculum Vitae

Campbell University

2005-2008 Bachelor of Arts in Religion

Magna cum laude, Sigma Tau Delta, Theta Alpha Kappa, Presidential Scholarship recipient, President's list.

Wake Forest University

2008-2011 Master of Arts in Religion