

WHY NOT POSTCOLONIAL BIBLICAL CRITICISM IN (SOUTH) AFRICA: STATING THE OBVIOUS OR LOOKING FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE?¹

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Abstract

During the last five decades of the 20th century, the African continent has systematically rid itself of the direct control of the colonial powers. Yet in (South) Africa and elsewhere on the continent, there has until now been very few attempts to introduce postcolonial biblical criticism as a credible hermeneutical approach for the subcontinent. In the South African theological context with its two dominant theological approaches, African and Black Theology, a variety of hermeneutical approaches is represented across a wide spectrum. However, the traditional approaches has until now largely carried the day, both in hermeneutical positioning and its application to and use for interpreting biblical texts. This is certainly true of the wider, popular and ecclesial arena where the Bible is used, but is also the case in the academy. Postcolonial criticism has not been seized upon as a productive method for reading and interpreting the Bible, although its use has obvious benefits also within South Africa's post-Apartheid society. Postcolonial biblical criticism is nevertheless eminently suitable for a context characterised by the lingering colonial legacy, the continuous threat of neo-colonialism, and the position of displaced persons and refugees. This article considers possible reasons for the failure of postcolonial criticism to impact upon biblical studies in (South) Africa on a large scale, when it offers such obvious hermeneutical potential, spin-offs, as well as the opportunity to approach the Bible from a different than the traditional vantage point.

Key Words: Biblical Hermeneutics, Postcolonial studies, South Africa

Setting the Scene: Theology and Hermeneutics in (South) Africa

It is important to situate the question about the role and place of postcolonial biblical criticism in (South) Africa in the context of two broad modes of theologising in Africa.² African Theology with its strong inculturationist interest is built upon a hermeneutics of resonance, and Black Theology with its liberationist agenda is characterised by a hermeneutics of

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² Although a functional distinction (cf e.g. also in Hastings 1989:32,90-91; Maluleke 1996b:36-38; Mushete 1994:13-24), the validity of the perception of two, separate "theological schools" is contested; recently cf e.g. Maimela (1994b:vii-ix; 1994c:1-17); Martey (1993); Parratt (1995:195); Pato (1997:40-46) and Young (1986); and much earlier of course Cone (1993:393-403) and Tutu (1993:385-392) – the latter two references are to reprinted essays. For further references, cf Punt (1997:133, espec n35). Nyamiti (1994:35-36) distinguishes between South African Black Theology and African liberation theology, the latter which approaches the integration of the two streams as mentioned above.

liberation.³ While not constituting entirely different epistemological frameworks, they do operationalise two essentially different frames of reference as well as interpretative paradigms (Levison and Pope-Levison 1995:336-339).⁴ Concerning perceptions about the nature and role of the Bible, and still in general terms, the former is appreciative of the Bible and sees it as informing African Theology, while Black Theology has increasingly implicated both the interpretation of the Bible and the biblical documents as such in a wide range of injustices, often culminating in the purging of certain texts and even calls to *rewrite* Scripture.⁵

A postcolonial perspective would want to acknowledge that Black Theology implicates the biblical texts themselves as the products of the wider power struggle between the powerful and the oppressed which necessitates a selective, liberatory hermeneutic. On the other hand, however, it is not as easy as claiming that African theologians simply subscribe to biblical authority whereas Black theologians subordinate the Bible to other matters such as socio-political and economic experiences. African culture and especially African traditional religion often determines the use of the Bible in African Theology, as much as the political agenda of Black Theology remains to a large extent biblically inscribed and justified.⁶ The distinction is helpful to the degree in which it deals with the different appropriation of the Bible in Africa, showing not only two options in an inculturationist or liberationist agenda,⁷ but calling also for hermeneutical (and theological) strategies to penetrate and bridge the divide.

Indeed, rather than reserving postcolonial hermeneutics for Black Theology by focussing on matters broadly political, it can assist in breaking through the impasse which often appears in the discussions around different interpretive paradigms in African biblical studies. Postcolonial studies stress matters of crucial importance in African Theology, emphasising culture, identity and representation, thus reposing the question about hermeneutics, and about hermeneutical privilege in particular. A postcolonial approach to biblical hermeneutics may

³ For other typologies of theologies in Africa cf De Gruchy (1991:217-223) and Maluleke (1996b:33-60; 2001:169-175). However, in Africa the theological arena is still dominated by these two theological streams, both statistically as far as *published* theology goes, and by providing the launching pad, or more, for more recent theological developments (e.g. the links between African Theology and the Gospel-translatibility theologies of Bediako and Sanneh, and the relation of Feminist/Womanist Theology to Black Theology). The prevalence of “Mission Theology” and its impact on the landscape of African Christianity is probably too easily dismissed by theologians (cf Mushete 1994:13-16).

⁴ Space does not allow for a comparison with readings of the Bible in the Black Diaspora. For a brief historical overview, cf however, Wimbush (1991:81-97; 1993:130-132). Yorke's (1997:149-157) typology applied to the two different appropriations of the Bible in the Black Diaspora context fails to convince. Some “liberationist/socio-political” readings are equally “literalist” if not “magical”, and vice versa – is it simply a matter of inadequate terminology amid valid distinctions, or are the latter flawed as well?

⁵ Cf EATWOT (1994:169); Martey (1993:106). For one example of each theological school's relationship with the Bible, cf e.g. Mbiti (1986:43) who states almost categorically that “African Christianity is based on and is using the *entire Bible*” (emphasis added), compared to Maimela's emphasis on a liberatory “biblical theological vision” (Maimela 1994a:190-192,195). Martey (1993:131,137) who attempts to integrate the inculturationist and liberationist emphases – “(a) relevant, contextual and authentic theology for Africa must have a unitary perception of inculturation and liberation” – pleads for a rereading of the Bible within the ambit of a hermeneutics of suspicion, a task he identifies as crucial. Differences in hermeneutical approach and methodology will have to be addressed elsewhere.

⁶ Such generalisation is not intended to deny that African Theology is plural, effectively consisting of a range of African theologies, allowing a variety of typologies such as denominational or confessional, and others (Hastings 1989:86-87), each of which would ascribe a particular level of value to the biblical texts. However, the “issue-orientated approach to theology” common to African *Theologies* (Hastings), provides justification for some cautious generalisation, without deleting necessary distinctions.

⁷ Although the Black theological agenda is replacing the African one “at the cutting edge of Christian intellectual activity” according to Hastings (1989:32). His presupposition, however, is clear: “A healthy culture today ... is a justice-conscious culture; an unhealthy culture is a culture-conscious culture” (Hastings 1989:35).

find itself in a position to provide a framework to link the different emphases of African and Black Theology, and their derivative hermeneutical strategies.

Moreover, participation in the postcolonial discourse offers mainstream biblical studies an (other) opportunity to move beyond its ghetto-like existence of a narrow religious sphere. It creates space for considering the Bible's legacy in our cultural heritage, where it has continued to be a "book for life" in the sense of an identity cultural marker (Brenner 2000:11). With many potential benefits to the discipline itself, especially at the level of hermeneutics, it remains somewhat anomalous that it has until now been less than eagerly embraced.⁸

Before considering possible reasons why postcolonial biblical studies has not really caught on in Africa, either in any of the two hermeneutical-theological streams or in a general sense, a brief description of how postcolonial criticism in biblical studies is understood in this article, is in order. This will underscore the claim that postcolonial studies has significant potential to contribute to biblical studies in (South) Africa.

Postcolonial Studies and Biblical Hermeneutics

Postcolonial studies of texts can, in short, be described as a variety of hermeneutical approaches characterised by their political nature and ideological agenda, the textual politics of which ultimately concerns both a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of retrieval or restoration. It interacts with colonial history and its aftermath, where a history of repression and repudiation is foregrounded, but since it also deals with exposé, restoration and transformation are part of the repertoire of a postcolonial overture. As a form of ideology criticism, it considers the socio-political context and the interpreter's stance within it of primary importance. At the same time, postcolonial studies is about more than ideology criticism. It specifically addresses the silencing of the Other through the colonial strategy of posing the colonised as the inverse of the coloniser, and so emptying the colonised world of meaning⁹ (Gandhi 1998:15), and often vilifying the colonised Other: The savage versus the civilised, the emotional/stupid versus the rational/intelligent, the heathen versus the religiously committed. Location is an important, heuristic, political matter,¹⁰ and time, distance and space are categories of prime significance, and so is the autobiographical,¹¹ all of

⁸ Scholars who have pursued postcolonial biblical studies in Africa include notably e.g. Dube (1996a; 2000). However, even a cursory investigation of recent scholarly writing in Southern Africa reveal little sustained interest in postcolonial biblical studies, e.g. the articles in Kinoti and Waliggo (1997); Getui, Maluleke and Ukpong (2001); and, West and Dube (2001); or recent survey articles such as Mwombeki (2001) and Ukpong (1999).

⁹ Postcolonial studies illustrate how coloniser and colonised were (are) linked to one another, although the interaction was hardly on equal terms. It attempts to "analyze the major mistakes of the past" while building "bridges for future dialogue" (Dube 1996b:248-249). But how is coloniser and colonised to be defined? Can one simply rely on past configurations and/or experiences in a postmodern world with its many manifestations of manipulative, oppressive, excessive forms and practices of power? May one man's liberating experience not be another woman's encounter with hegemony? Cf De Kock (1993:44-69).

¹⁰ The production and promotion of New Testament texts during the period of imperial formation are considered as more than merely an important setting or "background". The imperial context is seen as constitutive for the development and production of New Testament texts. But equally so does the location and practices of interpretation – the politics of biblical interpretation – assume significance beyond being the tools of the trade and the locations where the trade is practiced.

¹¹ Autobiographical criticism often resists the personal, with the emphasis on political, economical or social/cultural systems, local or global, which cause inequitable power relations and downright oppression. My own social location at the time of writing the paper was that of being a white, male, South African biblical scholar at a historical disadvantaged (black) higher education institution, and a part-time minister in a rural, coloured and black church, while my investigation was naturally informed by the broader South African and global context.

which is of great importance in getting to grips with imperialist and hegemonic structures of oppression.

Often, other hegemonic and contemporary contexts are included in its purview. Post-colonial studies is a synecdoche (*a part which represents the whole*, or inversely the whole which represents a part) for imperialist-(post)colonial studies,¹² and is “ideological reflection on the discourse and practice of imperialism and colonialism from the vantage point of a situation where imperialism and colonialism have come – by and large but by no means altogether so – to a formal end but remain very much at work in practice, as neo-imperialism and neocolonialism” (Segovia 1998:51 n3). Imperialism and colonialism, respectively, exhibit many faces, register conflicting impacts on human lives and society and are experienced in a variety of different ways. But both phenomena are intimately related to structures of political power and ideology, economic structures and practices, and social-cultural configurations and experiences.¹³ A postcolonial study concerns itself with social formation and analysis as well as cultural production, and it is therefore an attempt to rewrite history. More than but not excluding the attempt at rewriting history, postcolonialism posits a reflective modality which allows for a critical rethinking¹⁴ (thinking “through” and therefore “out of”) of historical imbalances and cultural inequalities which were established by colonialism (Gandhi 1998:176). And the postcolonial label is therefore both historical and based on a political position (Gallagher 1994: 3).

Postcolonial studies are intrinsically tied to hermeneutics, and represent a shift in emphasis, a particular strategy of reading, an attempt to point out what was missing in previous analyses, to rewrite and correct, although its politics of textuality has already come under fire for its lack of political action. However, the culture-critical call by Robert Scholes that “textual studies must be pushed beyond the discrete boundaries of the page and the book into institutional practices and social structures” (Leitch 1994: 281), necessarily becomes integral to postcolonial biblical studies and interpretation.¹⁵ The engaged political and literary interventionist strategy of postcolonial criticism notwithstanding, such approaches to the Bible cannot be separated from other debates on the contemporary practice of biblical studies. In fact, such debates can often most aptly be described with reference to the postcolonial condition, especially if the latter is perceived to include both the colonial or suppressed and the imperial or hegemonic.

The urge towards decolonisation is often represented in a wide spectrum of stances and practices, emerging with the awareness of imperial forces and accompanying domination strategies. In biblical studies they include strategies for resisting the latter, while exploring alternative positions and practices to foster “liberating interdependence” between nations, races, genders, economics and cultures (Dube 1996a:38). Postcolonial biblical interpretation is not intended as a monolithic approach devoted only to the geopolitical scene of historical

¹² One commentator goes further in arguing that it is a “classic and confusing study of synecdoche”, opting rather for “Imperial/Colonial Studies” (Segovia 2000b:14 n1).

¹³ Used more loosely, colonialism refers to “any relation of structural domination which relies upon a self-serving suppression of ‘the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question’” (Gandhi 1998:85, referring to Talpade Mohanty).

¹⁴ “Post” should not conjure up the ideas of amnesia or repetition, but rather “a procedure in ‘ana-’, including analysis, anamnesis, anagogy and anamorphosis which elaborate an ‘initial forgetting’” (Lyotard, in Gandhi 1998:174).

¹⁵ So e.g. Segovia claims that besides a biblical critic and even a constructive theologian, he is also a cultural critic, a task which includes a focus on issues of construction, representation and power, through an investment in contextual and ideological analysis as found in the accumulation of studies referred to as Cultural Studies. The task includes the investigation of various other dimensions of the biblical interpreter’s social context besides the socio-religious (1998:51 n2; 2000c:59).

colonisation or even modern superpower activity, nor can it afford to aspire to become an all-encompassing and replacement master narrative. Postcolonial studies generally focus on “nations” and political power formation (Gugelberger 1994:582), and issues concerning race, gender, sexual orientation and others are increasingly put on its agenda. “Pioneers of postcolonial criticism are from the outset also seeking to make alliances with those subjected to and seeking liberation from sexual, racial, colonial, and class domination”¹⁶ (Horsley 2000: 10).

This does not mean that a postcolonial approach champions the “ideal of a cosmopolitics”, an ultimate and all-inclusive oppositional front,¹⁷ a “new optic” characterised by an accommodating nature (within its own perceived paradigm, of course). Amid the dialectic of colonial and imperial experience, projects of resistance and emancipation are disparate rather than harmonious, diverse rather than uniform, “given the diverse nature of domination and oppression” – in other words, “there is no self-evident project of resistance and emancipation for all in the periphery”.¹⁸ It is both important and required that “the differences among the various discourses of resistance and emancipation are to be emphasized as much as the similarities” (Segovia 2000a:140-41).¹⁹ Postcolonial biblical criticism could therefore not try to be everything to everybody, or attempt to replace or co-opt, for example, feminism,²⁰ or Marxism, since postcolonial criticism addresses a different context and sets of relationships. Rather, a postcolonial approach to biblical studies, “takes competing modes of discourse for granted, renounces the idea of any master narrative as in itself a construct, and looks for truly global interaction” (Segovia 2000a:33).

Postcolonial biblical criticism functions as an anamnestic and heuristic framework within which to engage the biblical texts.²¹ It challenges scholars who find more value in other hermeneutic frameworks, and even its detractors, to ensure that their work does not produce

¹⁶ It is interesting that “religion” as hegemonic category is - but for Dube - still under-investigated.

¹⁷ The danger of “postmodern colonization of the postcolonial” relates to the tendency to assimilate, incorporate and in the end homogenise everything, including the “oppositional other”, into the “Western post(al) network”. In order to avoid such homogenisation while allowing for the unitary sense of the multifarious network of postcolonial studies, Gugelberger proposes to take “postcolonial” to refer to “the cultures affected by the imperial process”. But similarly, the use of postcolonial as a catch-all can make it impervious to addressing the specifics of the past *and* present, and so become an imperialist metanarrative itself. “The ahistorical, universalizing, homogenizing effects of postcolonial theory ... may not provide a politically useful analysis for those cast as Others in a specific time and place” (Gallagher 1996:232).

¹⁸ Postcolonial study insists on transgressing disciplinary boundaries in its advocacy of an interdisciplinarity and a multicultural curriculum. Postcolonial studies are not reducible to a specific “field” or “core” within such a field, as much as it cannot be disconnected from previous disciplines. Cultural and postcolonial studies are deliberately not disciplinary but rather inquisitive activities that question the inherent problems of disciplinary studies; they “discipline the disciplines” (Gugelberger 1994:582).

¹⁹ From a postmodern vantage point, Segovia stresses that a multidimensional and conflicted conception of resistance and emancipation is not debilitating but liberating by adding to the relativising power of diversity in a context of domination or oppression. Not disavowing the ideal of a cosmopolitics, he recognises that it can only be advanced and even defined as a common task of all groups in question, “a most challenging and demanding task” (2000a:141).

²⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the combination of a rhetorical emphasis with feminist theory will enable the “full-turn” of biblical studies although a paradigm shift in biblical studies has so far stayed out due to the inability of rhetoric to link up with feminist, liberationist and postcolonial studies (1999:13). Attention to rhetoric and especially to its epistemic status is certainly important, but it may in the end be postcolonial studies which offers the theory and practice for exposing configurations of center and margin, empire and colonised, hegemony and powerlessness. Postcolonial studies is liberatory in nature, and without eschewing the gender component, or indeed issues of race, sexual orientation, class and social status, it offers a framework which is not predisposed towards creating, anew, an insider-outsider rhetoric based on such components.

²¹ Probably more than this, in the sense of retrieving both subjugated voices and unacknowledged voices, but this was spelt out above in detail.

or contribute to readings which will perpetuate colonialist, imperialist or hegemonic interpretations of the texts of the Bible, or its nature and status.

Why not Postcolonial Biblical Criticism in (South) Africa?

Why is it then that despite its possibilities for fruitful use, postcolonial hermeneutics have not caught on in biblical studies in (South) Africa? Is a postcolonial approach not eminently suitable to articulate the desires of subjugated people regarding their senses of identity and self-determination, to offer strategies to pose a counter-offensive against political, economic and cultural forms of imperialism (cf Carusi 1991:95-96), including issues of gender, sexuality and ethnicity? Is it the strong influence of the traditional or conventional, and largely religious, setting pertaining in the sub-continent of Southern Africa, which rules out cultural studies in biblical studies? Is the power of spiritual-devotional readings as popular style of Bible reading and the historico-grammatical readings of the academy simply too overwhelming? On the other hand, it may be that the term “postcolonial” is not only slippery, but in the South African context notoriously influenced by linguistic and racial position.²²

Could the absence of a sustained presence of postcolonial discourse in (South) African biblical studies perhaps be explained with reference to the nature of the discourse itself? Postcolonial theorists often tend to dismiss their own enterprise, and even positive statements about the value of postcolonial theory at times gravitate toward obscurity, abounding in jargon.²³ There is also the danger that as long as Western or even Western-located academics pursue the postcolonial paradigm, it may amount in the eye of the beholder to little more than expedient exportation of the West’s own political and cultural dilemmas and problems, at best, or at worse, Western guilt (Eagleton 1999:3-6). Tied in with the insider-outsider polemic, is the typically “strong Othering”-process found among postcolonial theorists, and where complicity in the poststructuralist binarity or oppositionality of postcolonialism are deemed to disqualify critique, leading to critical disablement through a “self-defeating paradox” (De Kock 1993:44-69). Or with reference to these and other debates, is postcolonial theory in the end perceived to be more dissembling than constructive and assembling, and that the theoretical investment might not be borne out by hermeneutical dividends?

These broader concerns would indeed have an effect on the ability of postcolonial hermeneutical studies to take root in Africa, but other, more contextual factors may in the end have more of an influence. Rather than succumbing to the temptation of providing one-on-one reasons, this essay wants to explore a number of possible scenarios which may contribute for the failure of the postcolonial paradigm to connect with (South) African biblical studies in a thorough-going way.

Hermeneutics in Service to the Church and/or the Academy?

The explanation for why postcolonial biblical studies has not (yet) caught on, is related to, but should also be searched for beyond the strained relationship between academic and ecclesial-popular readings, the strong pietist context in which the Bible is read in Southern Africa, and the dominance of the traditional. And, in Southern Africa the problem lies deeper and is more profound than that of political and cultural relationship. The academy-church relationship plays a role in the disinterest in postcolonial studies, but other power relations are also important, requiring of all involved in biblical studies but especially those in influential

²² The term colonial is disputed on both sides of the historical Apartheid divide, but Carusi (1991:96) suggests that the term “neo-imperialism” is more than apt for the contemporary SA society.

²³ “Post-colonial theory makes heavy weather of a respect for the Other, but its most immediate Other, the reader, is apparently dispensed from this sensitivity” (Eagleton 1999:3).

positions and with great resources, to strive for equitable arrangements in the academy. It is also about inherent contradictions and dichotomies in academic biblical studies. For example, trained, academic-intellectual readings of the Bible as literary document located in full-time, professional careers are often opposed to “ordinary”, religious-devotional readings of the Bible as sacred text, readings for moral, mystical or ritual purposes.

The power-play distinctions are therefore not exclusively borne out by male/female, or Western/African orientation or Two-Thirds-world/Western world binaries, but also by the different purposes of reading. But in biblical studies, the situation is exacerbated by a high degree of specialisation and its inevitable spin-off, fragmentation. Issues of commercial value of research and publishing projects, academic and scientific merit and the concomitant status and power positions of scholars are underwritten by a philosophical and ideological frame of reference. Given this situation, will African biblical scholars eventually have a relationship to African Bible readers different from that of their Western counterparts in Europe and the USA?²⁴ But would such a relationship and concomitant claims in the end be based on scholarly endeavour and acumen or personal, hermeneutical privilege? And how is this potential tension addressed in times when the autobiographical is valued, neutrality espoused and claims in that regard considered naïve or not patently dangerous and social engagement valued?

Textual Politics, and Real Readers – in Real Locations

As a counter-force, the biblical studies guild can benefit from postcolonialism’s ability to loosen the grip by which Western cultural disciplines control intellectual practices around the world and in (South) Africa, in order to conform to their endorsed designs. Aligning itself with marginalised and excluded voices, postcolonial criticism can point out the cultural hegemonies and relations of domination as well as the neo-imperial designs that veil or hide them away. Accordingly, postcolonial biblical criticism can provide the ground for mounting political challenges to reigning forms of hegemony (Horsley 1998:170-172). Imperial power relations which during the time of the New Testament become more subtle and reliant upon imperial images rather than the exercise of (military) force, especially in the wake of crumbling cultural and political resistance, reminds of the neo-imperial impact of global capital. Behind the subterfuge of images, global capital in decentralised format asserts its presence in the modern world.²⁵

One of the most important and valuable elements of postcolonial biblical interpretation is its movement beyond the Enlightenment quest for the universal, rational reader.²⁶ It encourages biblical scholars to own up to their gender, culture and social location, and in the process develops models of interpretation which can empower all readers of the Bible within their particular contexts (Brett 1998:306). Postcolonialism’s reach extends to the global *academic* world providing “an ethical paradigm for a systematic critique of institutional suffering” (Gandhi 1998:174). However, postcolonial biblical criticism can in its literary focus on the biblical texts become restrictive, and an emphasis on the socio-cultural can exclude the study of the political aspect of the Bible, as well as the politics of such

²⁴ Space does not allow for introducing and participation in the Eurocentric-Afrocentric debate here!

²⁵ Although, “[t]he relations between North and South are not primarily about discourse, language or identity, but about armaments, commodities, exploitation, migrant labour, debt and drugs” (Eagleton 1999:3). And caution is advised, since “postcoloniality is just another name for the globalisation of cultures and histories” (Gandhi 1998:126).

²⁶ Or the “scientific reader”, as Segovia (1998:52) refers to the same construct based on universality, objectiveness, and impartiality, fully decontextualised and non-ideological.

studies. Beyond biblical studies, “decolonising cultural resistance” (Said) has been castigated for its cultural focus which generally excluded political engagement, although it is admitted that cultural and political aspects cannot be detached.

As a discourse of resistance and emancipation, postcolonial hermeneutics operates from the perspective of the “geopolitical relationship between center and periphery, the imperial and the colonial”. The investigation and analysis of this relationship extends to the interpretation of texts as much as it does to the practice of interpretation itself. The post-colonial hermeneutical privilege extends to the periphery rather than the center and the colonial rather than the imperial, and therefore highlights an agenda of liberation and emancipation (Segovia 2000a:140). A postcolonial reading is socially located, and acknowledges differences related to race, gender, religion, nation, environment, and values while admitting that difference does not equal deficiency. In fact, as a multicultural reading,²⁷ it perceives of no one religion, race, gender or nation as superior to another (Dube 1996:249).

Postcolonial biblical criticism therefore requires of scholars to address questions of positionality (Ghandi 1998:59) and the politics of representation (Kwok 1996:215), and makes it imperative for them to announce and acknowledge their social location(s). But is there an adequate framework to account for this in scholarly work, and who can justifiably claim to represent the postcolonial others?²⁸ And more practical, how are postcolonial readings to be incorporated into mainstream academy, without placing such a focus on its marginal status that the very act of inclusion becomes, ironically, exclusion by default, effected through romanticisation of the margin? How does one insure that postcolonial readings indeed become more than technical exercises but rather moral acts of commitment (Berquist 1996:32) capable of reshaping social, historical and literary insights in our discipline?²⁹ Or is it true that “Its flamboyant theoretical avantgardism conceals a rather modest political agenda?” (Eagleton 1999:6; cf also 3.4.2 below).

If the maxim, “The worth and credibility of postcolonial criticism will be judged by how it orchestrates the unique and fragile and imagined claims of one community against another” (Sugirtharajah 1998a:24), is applied to postcolonial biblical studies, the notions of its valuation and comparative value need to be maintained. Clearly, the value of postcolonial biblical criticism is not determined by some essentialist notion of truth, scientific rigour or methodological consistency, as espoused in the Cartesian-Enlightenment scientific models. Rather, postcolonial biblical criticism remains contested, at least in part, since it requires value-judgements and ethical considerations, evaluation and critique (Segovia 2000c:80-81) and furthermore has to deal with the relevancy question more directly than many traditional (read, historical-critical, literary and socio-scientific) hermeneutical paradigms and methodologies ever tended to do!

A Different Status for the Bible

It is ironic, but also useful, that attention to postcolonial criticism of *current* political-economic and cultural relations allows for the identification of layers in the *ancient* biblical literature, as the products of an emerging struggle for domination and authority (Horsley

²⁷ It is appropriate, therefore, to envisage postcolonial studies as multidimensional, multiperspectival and multidisciplinary (Segovia 2000b:11-12).

²⁸ Eagleton equates the poststructuralist focus on “subject position” with “the existentialist obsession with authenticity: What matters is less what you say than the fact that *you* are saying it” (1999:6).

²⁹ Postcolonial biblical criticism allows us to rethink biblical interpretation, increasingly characterised by globalisation, diverse forms of neo-colonialism, devaluing *and* commercialisation of human life, ongoing violent and armed conflicts – so many of the latter which have a religious subtext.

2000:153). Investigation of the influence of colonising elements during the texts' production (Berquist 1996:32-33; Kwok 1996:213; Tamez 1996:204), the status of the texts and the nature of the Bible as authoritative or authorising document, and the ambivalence of the biblical texts, all form part of a postcolonial agenda. Postcolonial investigation of the formation of the biblical texts and ultimately the biblical canon requires more than just an investigation and analysis of the historically layered development of the text as found in traditional approaches, and have to deal with the importance of cultural materialist assumptions. Such assumptions include that "texts are implicated in their economic and political contexts" and that "all literature is symptomatic of, and responsive to, historical conditions of repression and recuperation" (Gandhi 1998:141-142).

The status and the nature of the Bible as a literary, as well as a cultural product (cf Kwok 1996:212), and its complicity in the colonial and imperial projects of the past as reflected in its texts, deserve as much attention as its later profitable use in legitimising colonisation. In its texts, the Bible gives evidence of its agency in its own embodiment and sanctioning of imperialist intent, as well as being the casualty of the imperialism of others. "[C]olonialism dominates and determines the interest of the biblical texts, and we could reasonably describe the Bible as a colonial document" (Sugirtharajah 1998a:19; cf Tamez 1996:203-205).³⁰ At least three distinct but related areas of investigation present themselves. A postcolonial study of the history of the formation of the texts, and ultimately, the canon as imperialist construct, would concern itself with their layered nature, relating these to the contemporary dominant interests. But secondly, a focus on the history of the presentation of the texts and that ultimate symbol, *the Bible*, in the (South) African context, will lead to the investigation of the ways in which and the reasons why it soon attained authoritative status.³¹ A valuable and informative framework for such studies is provided when the text is seen as Other (e.g. Segovia; McDonald), and when this framework is heuristically combined with views of the canon as prototype rather than archetype (e.g. Schüssler Fiorenza), or even as "diasporic adventure" (Kwok).³² And finally, postcolonial biblical studies have to cross the boundaries of the canon, leading to a transversal look at the biblical text (Tamez 1996:205). Multiscripturality demands not only the discovery and creation of different texts but also coming to terms with other religious texts on different levels (cf Punt 2001).

However, if in the framing of postcolonial hermeneutics it is in the final instance not concerned with the "truth of the text" but rather with the central issue of the texts' promotion of colonial ideology (Sugirtharajah 1998a:19), its usefulness on the African continent where the Bible is still highly valued for many reasons, is less than clear. If the Bible is studied only for identifying intrinsic textual elements which provide colonial codes, and when the value of studying these texts for their own sakes or for theological (and spiritual) inspiration are secondary at best, it remains a question whether postcolonial hermeneutics are not short-circuiting *itself*, in Africa, but also elsewhere.³³ Given the complicity of religion and, in particular, Christianity in the discourse and practices of Western colonialism and imperialism,

³⁰ So for example Peskowitz argues that the Bible "cannot be separated from an imperial history and its attendant occupations and displacements, its degradations and pain" (1996:192). And, "[a]lthough the Bible's democratization was greatly enhanced by translations into vernaculars, it remained confined in elite secrecy" (Brenner 2000:11).

³¹ Studies on the "Word-of-God" theologies in Africa already point in this direction. Cf the debate on the Bible as "Word of God" in the African context (e.g. Punt 1998:esp 272-276); Kwok (1996:213) on the "apolitical reification" of the Bible as Word of God.

³² Where the canon and texts are no longer "fixed, stable and privileged points of origin" (Kwok 1996: 213).

³³ Postcolonial biblical studies want to address, among others, the gulf between the academic study of the Bible and "the needs of Christians around the world" (Warrior 1996:207).

and the powerful role accorded to the Bible in all this, the focus on colonial codes in texts is necessary. But, should the rehabilitation of biblical texts relevant to a reading practice shaped by interlocking concerns such as self-determination, ethnicity, migration and other such themes, not also include a rereading on theological level, in light of past and remaining imperial tendencies on this very level?

The Role of Tradition(s) of Interpretation

Postcolonial interpretation requires investigation and explanation of the influence of interpretive histories not only in as far as the hermeneutics and readerly strategies of trained readers are concerned, but equally so with hermeneutical and other traditions of influence operative in the ordinary, thematic reading style. It includes traditions which run in a general sense across both popular and trained readings such as the spiritual and individualised interpretation of Paul, as well as more particular and locally formatted readings, for example an emphasis related to either an African liberationist or African cultural approach. But, the analysis of the influence of traditions of interpretation also includes, and extends beyond, the differences in hermeneutical position and method, or spiritual-meditative versus socially engaged readings.³⁴

Western (Scientific) Discourse

Biblical studies as they exist today are largely characterised by their Western origins and resultant discourses, as they appear in theological, hermeneutical and other enterprises. Biblical scholars are not unlike other academics and intellectuals when they defend existing discursive formations, construct elaborate defenses and apologies, and otherwise extol the virtue of their and their predecessors' contributions. Scholars, however, are not only primary role-players in discourses which are "heavily policed cognitive systems", but have until recently and with the exception of a few, been unwilling to admit to what extent scholarly discourses "control and delimit both the mode and the means of *representation* in a given society" (Gandhi 1998:77). On the other hand, and emerging from debates along the lines of vernacular hermeneutics and the politics of identity and exclusion, strong postmodern sentiments were in the past expressed against the notion of representing others and their particular identities, concluding that it amounts to nothing more than the futile search for the comfort of origins (Brett 1996:222), and even the assertion of ethno-nationalism.

In fact, a post-Apartheid reading in South Africa finds itself in the unenviable position that in its attempt to define itself, it has to contend with its own subjection to cultural and epistemic imperialism, while internalisation of Western discursive formations already show up in its terminology and intellectual categories.³⁵ When strong nationalist discursive strategies reappraise the difference of Africa, some colonialist or imperial tendencies take a second bow. For example, emphasising oppositionality to the extent of reaffirming the binary oppositions of Western thought leads to a contrast between a collective African spirit and the individual Western consciousness; communal ownership in Africa versus capitalism and its inherent greed; and, sexual expression in Africa unencumbered by "guilt-producing

³⁴ The role of ecclesial and educational programmes as dispensers of Western-oriented, Enlightenment-style paradigm of biblical studies in Southern Africa have to be accounted for as well. Similarly, the powerful and monetary influence of communities often characterised by their devout if conservative/fundamentalist tendencies on institutions and their programmes of learning in theology and biblical studies, often ensure the continuation of traditional hermeneutical practices.

³⁵ For the dominance of the conventional essentialist, universalist categories of the West propped up by an absolutised idea of the "European mind", cf De Kock (1993:esp 64)

oedipalizing mechanisms” and Western sexual pathologies. “This type of oppositionality can occur only where Western epistemic systems have become so powerful that they achieve universal value, to the extent that the colonized body identifies its difference in terms of the imperialist’s binaries” (Carusi 1991:97-98). The classic response of indigenous authors is to embark upon a self-defense and re-investment of culture³⁶ and the past with value. “Calls for a return to pre-colonial identity³⁷ based upon ... a [Marxist] view of consciousness are evidently self-contradictory,³⁸ since they construct identity precisely in the same terms as the bourgeois imperialist subject, cloaked however in a disclosure of return and recovery” (Carusi 1991:99). The heuristic value of using these categories may however do epistemic damage to postcolonial theory and endeavours, short-circuiting both its disassembling and assembling functions.

Beyond Humanism: Roots and Continuing Legacies

The link between postcolonialism and poststructuralism is based not merely on temporal contingency, although postcolonialism might have gained institutional ascendancy in this way,³⁹ especially through poststructuralism’s “clear and confidently theorised proposition for a Western critique of Western civilisation” which proceed beyond Marxist, economic paradigms. Poststructuralist theory understands Western domination as the manifestation of an injurious association between power and knowledge, and thus “diagnose the material effects and implications of colonialism as an epistemological malaise at the heart of Western rationality” (Gandhi 1998:25-26). The intellectual theory of postcolonial studies is informed by the dialectic between Marxism, and poststructuralism and postmodernism. “While the poststructuralist critique of Western epistemology⁴⁰ and theorisation of cultural alterity/difference is indispensable to postcolonial *theory*, materialist philosophies, such as Marxism, seem to supply the most compelling basis for postcolonial *politics*”⁴¹ (Gandhi 1998:ix). While

³⁶ Ironically, at the time when anthropological theory divests itself from “culture” for its excessive coherence and orderliness, as well as restrictedness and totality (Brett 1996:220). Brett explores the distinction between culture and ethnic identity or people groups, holding to culturally permeable nature of people groups but also pointing out that people are the moral agents and not culture.

³⁷ “But original African culture, which would include perhaps a mode of subject-specification different from Western culture, has been eradicated and hybridized to a virtually irrecoverable degree” (Carusi 1991:99-100). In the end, any claim to an authentic indigeneity may in the contemporary world prove self-defeating.

³⁸ A particular problem for Third-World liberation-focused hermeneutics and theologies were (are) their shared assumptions with metropolitan, academic culture, availing themselves of the same intellectual structure and modernist assumptions, mobilising the same Western theories and methodologies, using an overly Christocentric framework, and in the process were absorbed by the West (Sugirtharajah 1999b:11-12).

³⁹ Viewed from the vantage point of social activity and political processes, the rise of postcolonial studies can be connected to three politically identifiable events: The failure of communism, the rise of capitalism and the loss of political momentum by the non-aligned movement. For a broader positioning, cf Gugelberger’s (1994:581) references to the end of France’s involvement in Indochina; the Algerian war; the Mau Mau uprisings in Kenya and the dethroning of Egypt’s King Farouk; on literary front Satre broke with Camus on the Algerian issue, Castro delivered his “History shall absolve me” speech, Fanon published his “Black skin, white masks”. In 1950 Alfred Sauvy invented the term “Third World”, generally seen as pejorative in the English-speaking world, but widely used in the French-, German-, and Spanish-speaking worlds, and by Marxists generally (Gugelberger 1994:853).

⁴⁰ As propounded in the classic ideals of the Enlightenment: “All knowledge as science; the scientific method as applicable to all areas of inquiry; nature or facts as neutral and knowable; research as a search for truth involving value-free observation and recovery of facts; and the researcher as a champion of reason who surveys the facts with disinterested eyes” (Segovia 2000a:38).

⁴¹ This is of course not to ignore the ongoing debate between Marxist critics and postcolonial critics. The latter are accused of succumbing to late capitalism or “capitalist modernity” (Ahmad), in addressing the “superstructure of imperialism” while ignoring its material base: Social formation is neglected and unaffected, and cultural production remains at the level of capitalism. Marxist critics, on the other hand, are charged by

postmodernism depicts both a crisis of legitimation and a crisis of rationality,⁴² post-structuralism in similar vein evidences a celebration of difference,⁴³ with deconstructive différance incapable of much more than the recognition of alternatives.⁴⁴ Poststructuralist alternatives are open textual traces, which always allow and in fact invite other, different readings. Rationality is destabilised as much as Truth is subverted, and assuming a political position is both indefensible and unreasonable. To perceive of poststructuralism as originally a critique on and contestation of bourgeois structures therefore goes beyond Derridean deconstruction to include also criticism of *humanism*, as is evident in the work of Kristeva and Barthes.

But it is the specific form of its critique of humanism⁴⁵ – and Western metaphysics and rationality – which renders poststructuralism politically inoperative. “The poststructuralist project can in many ways be seen as the affirmation of difference as pure negativity, giving way to an infinite pluralism or dispersion: The index of its failure is the point at which it erupts into a positivity” (Carusi 1991:100-101). While poststructuralism might have initiated its inability to transform itself, its emphasis on anti-humanism is nevertheless important and can be useful in theorising postcolonialism. Poststructuralism nevertheless found sustained engagement in a positive political agenda difficult, since its theoretical position promotes the recognition of endless alternatives even when, to be sure, it emphasises anti-humanism and transformation.

Poststructuralism reacts against an Enlightenment humanism(s)⁴⁶ which postulates that beyond the diversity of human experience it is possible to distinguish a universal and given human nature, and – equally important – that its discernment can be evidenced in the common language of rationality. Poststructuralist critics attack the notion of the possibility of rational and universal consensus towards conceptualising a humane, liberal and just society, arguing that such universal (and thus normative) postulation of rational unanimity is totalitarian and hostile to the challenges of otherness and difference. In fact, since “rationality” and “human nature” are historical constructions, they are subject to historical interests and conditions (Gandhi 1998:27).

their postcolonial counterparts for failing to direct a comprehensive critique against colonial history and ideology and neglecting to consider the historical, cultural and political alterity or difference of the colonised world, *and* being blinded by socio-economic class to such an extent that they fail to perceive any other social difference, and ultimately succumb to the ideology of racism embedded in Western life and thought (cf Gandhi 1998:24; Segovia 2000a:136-37). Said also reminds us of Marx’s argument that the benefits of British colonialism more than counteracted its violence and injustices (Gandhi 1998:33).

⁴² Postmodernism invokes the notion of co-existing social and cultural narratives, presupposing a utopia of equality, and so questions both the effectiveness and in particular the desirability of political intervention (Carusi 1991:101).

⁴³ Lacan offers a fragmented and split subject, shifting the emphasis from fullness to lack; Kristeva focus on significance which “overflows and subverts the limits of the Logos; Derrida proposes différance where Meaning is reduced to a trace of absence/presence; and, Deleuze launches an attack on the underpinnings of Rational action through desiring mechanisms” (Carusi 1991:100-101).

⁴⁴ It is therefore understandable that Habermas consigned both poststructuralism and postmodernism to a neo-conservative domain (Carusi 1991:101).

⁴⁵ A contentious term as evidenced by other configurations upon which this term has been bestowed upon in the past, e.g. Christianity *and* the critique of Christianity, science *and* anti-science, Marxism, existentialism, personalism, National Socialism, and Stalinism (Bernhauer and Mahon, in Gandhi 1998:27).

⁴⁶ Which accommodates the theory of subjectivity, rationality and knowledge first theorised by Bacon, Descartes and Locke and scientifically corroborated by Galileo and Newton – “scientific humanism” where humanity described the *way* people know. Renaissance Italy’s cultural and educational programme of humanism, better described as “literary humanism”, is humanity described by the “curricular *content* of knowledge”. Both forms of humanism, though, have a subtle subtext which insists upon the superiority of certain human beings, either because of superior learning, or cognitive facilities (Gandhi 1998:28-29).

Poststructuralist anti-humanism challenges the human sciences discourse, calling a self-present Rationality and Enlightenment into question primarily through the “empirico-transcendental doublet” (Foucault). The infinite duality of the subject-object relation refers to a person being at once the knowing subject and the object of knowledge, positing finitude as both the condition for and the limitation of knowledge.⁴⁷ But this very discourse becomes the aporia of poststructuralism,⁴⁸ since the closure of the subject-object relation, as well as the attempts to account for it, eventually leads to the conjecture of what approximates a reservoir of the inexpressible⁴⁹ and in the final instance the impossibility of breaking with Western systems of thought.⁵⁰

Colonial Mimicry: More of the Same?

Postcolonial interpretation agrees with postmodernism that truth is mapped, constructed and negotiated and rejects the notion of objective and neutral truth as expressions of political, religious and scholarly power. As far as the Bible is concerned, it is also no longer *the* meaning of the text which is sought after, as a multiplicity of meanings are acknowledged from the outset. This includes the revaluing of the little traditions (Meeks), the hidden transcripts (Scott) of the disadvantaged, marginalised and displaced, in other words, the Other embodied in women and minorities. A move beyond an essentialist notion of text *vis-à-vis* meaning is required, since it is not texts which contain meaning, waiting to be discovered, but meaning is properly viewed as being constructed in the text-reader interaction. These considerations are important for making sense of the lingering impact of the colonial and imperialist modes or thought, and their recycling in postcolonial hermeneutics.

In other words, the readings of postcolonial critics are generally illustrative of “colonial mimicry”,⁵¹ *firstly* in the sense of appearing to avail themselves of the “political and semantic imperatives of colonial discourse”, which in biblical studies would mean using the stock in trade

⁴⁷ And, continuing the debate with Marxist theory which insists upon dialogue to achieve cross-cultural consensus, poststructuralists argue that ethico-political dialogue partners are generally not equal, and mostly not equally represented in the final consensus. In the debate on humanism, it leaves the latter insisting upon the impossibility of a universal human nature, and Marxists on the impossibility of a politics lacking the principle of “solidarity” (Gandhi 1998:28).

⁴⁸ Drawing upon poststructuralist theory, a postcolonial commitment to the subaltern as the subject of his/her history requires both a new historicism and recognition of heterogeneity which ascribes value to difference although it cannot always be named – knowing and valuing difference in and for itself. Firstly, rather than searching for origins, historicism has to investigate present and future conditions while acknowledging the socio-historical embeddedness of the subject-effects, “which allows for an understanding of the materiality of a “body”, traversed by plural and sometimes contradictory lines of determination, which constitute a subject capable of action in those socio-historical configurations. And, secondly, heterogeneity in the postcolonial context needed to posit the colonised body as the subject of history, but moreover, to recognise the Other as an *effect* and not a positivity: It is “irretrievable, unlocatable, refractory and by definition unnameable”. “Consciousness is here only an effect, with *strategic* usefulness, of a plural and hybrid subject in a position eminently suited to appropriation of different discursive strategies, and therefore to turning each against itself” (Carusi 1991:104).

⁴⁹ “[T]he otherness of the Other, which is by definition nothing in itself, but simply all we project onto it, the repository of our desires” (Foucault, in Carusi 1991:102).

⁵⁰ This explains poststructuralism’s ability to explain imperialism but its inability to account for anti-colonialism of the kind that does not protest in the terms and discourse of the oppressor (Carusi 1991:103). Postcolonial discourse is often distinguished in its use of “so-called natural language”, posing a particularity foreign to Western terminology, and collapsing the theory of *différance* through the encounter with the untranslatable.

⁵¹ A concept which at once indicates “the ethical gap between the normative vision of post-Enlightenment civility and its distorted colonial (mis)imitation”, and also becomes the “sly weapon of anti-colonial civility, and ambivalent mixture of deference and disobedience”. Gandhi suggests that traces of Harold Bloom’s (literary) notion of the *anxiety of influence*, where the “beginning poet” struggles in Oedipal fashion against the “crippling influence of powerful literary ‘forefathers’” (and the gender specification is intended), are found in Bhabha use of colonial mimicry (Gandhi 1998: 149).

hermeneutical tools of the established (read: imperial) academy. To some extent, postcolonial biblical studies and commentary is not about the construction of new methodologies as much as about reinventing the tools of the trade, while abrogating their hegemonic elements. However, some traditional approaches in biblical studies might have to be consigned to the past, or alternatively might have to be so fundamentally altered as to no longer resemble their original vantage point, reasoning and format. Remaining claims to these approaches might serve only a final defiant, hegemonic purpose of claiming academic validity on their perceived institutional status – in other words, retaining and maintaining academic privilege and power. This would of course apply in particular to such hermeneutical paradigms and models that are reliant upon a Cartesian model of truth and reason. In the *second* place, colonial mimicry is also, and simultaneously, present among postcolonial biblical critics through recurrent attempts to “systematically [misrepresent] the foundational assumptions of this discourse by articulating it ... ‘syntagmatically with a range of differential knowledges and positionalities that both estrange its “identity” and produce new forms of knowledge, new modes of differentiation, new sites of power” (Bhabha, in Gandhi 1998: 150).⁵²

Mimicry is about the indispensable and many-sided hermeneutical and translational activities through which the transition from colonial vocabulary to its anti-colonial use is achieved, exemplified in postcolonial biblical studies by the rereadings which invert the traditional readings and understandings, and recognise the suppressed voices in and around the texts. Mimicry is not postcolonial revenge, epistemological and cultural revenge of previously excluded or marginal voices, but postcolonial approaches readjust its target to “diversify its mode of address and learn to speak more adequately to the world which it speaks for”, and to “acquire the capacity to facilitate a democratic colloquium between the antagonistic inheritors of the colonial aftermath” (cf Gandhi 1998: x). The extent to which postcolonial studies along with other liberatory approaches can avoid the accusation of enacting the mimetic desire of empire, will contribute both to its perceived usefulness as theoretical grid as well as intellectual and political credibility – although not necessarily in equal measure.

Hybridity Confronts the Nationalist Agenda

A proper romantic modality might just be what postcolonial criticism needs: “A willingness to critique, ameliorate and build upon the compositions of the colonial aftermath” (Gandhi 1998:166). This requires re-evaluation of the “militancy or the battle-cry for freedom”; “the reevaluation of humanism and especially African humanism”; and “the position of Marxist discourse”⁵³ (cf Carusi 1991:97), as Southern African readings of the Bible cannot ignore

⁵² Some postcolonial literary critics refuse the syncretism and hybridity inherent to mimicry, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o therefore decided to write only in his native Gikuyu. Ngũgĩ’s approach is often compared to that of Raja Rao who continues to use English in his work, and so subverts the supremacy of imperial textuality while simultaneously denying any invocation of an authentic or essential nativism (in his case, Indian-ness). Rao’s approach is not without danger, since from without the anti-colonial writer is co-opted for a critique of “third world cultural nationalism” (Gandhi 1998: 151).

⁵³ The usefulness of materialist (Marxist) criticism in reading the Bible probably needs renewed attention, with the vast majority of South African citizens from the working class, and its overwhelming black racial composition matched as most significant distinguishing factor by having been the victims of Apartheid. But the Marxist paradigm is also limiting in SA since while racial oppression can be functionally described with reference to the proletariat it is not exhausted by such ascription. It is prevalent also in the social and cultural arena, given the quest for cultural dominance and the formation of a national identity. The value of Marxism’s notion of consciousness, and the accompanying conscientisation and mobilisation is at stake when, because of its subject’s dependence on humanism, it may re-introduce an imperialist subject. Such subservience to positivist essentialism amounts to the introduction of a new ideology to replace an older one (Carusi 1991:99).

these thrusts in biblical – and wider literary – discourse. Building rather on Bhabha's notion of hybridity, which formulates the colonial presence as ambivalent, and divided between "its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference" (Bhabha, in Wan 2000:110), hybridity allows for staking out common ground, and the ability to foster a universal⁵⁴ discourse in the postcolonial setting. Cultural hybridity cannot easily be unpacked and does not generally lead to a quest for *true* origins, since it is never merely the aggregation of pre-given identities or essences (Bhabha, in Brett 1996:226), but identities which are, rather, strategically claimed and exerted performatively. Cultural hybridity then, emphasises the many diverse and at times contradictory but never hierarchically arranged identities of the postcolonial subject, and goes beyond the simple coloniser/colonised contrast (Gallagher 1996:235). Avoiding the trap of affirming a particular culture and therefore reinstating the prejudices embodied in the unconditional affirmation of European culture, "[n]ational consciousness [and not the different variant, nationalism] ought to prepare for the emergence of an ethically and politically enlightened global community". This will facilitate "getting beyond vengeful sorrows and lamentations over our colonial histories, necessary and therapeutic as they have been in our coming to terms with our colonial past and present postcolonial identities, and towards entering a new forum of equality in which we participate as confident dialogic partners" (Wan 2000:111).

The postcolonial maxim that "the reversed scramble for cultural primacy only serves to reinforce the old binaries which secured the performance of colonial ideology in the first place" (Gandhi 1998:147), might have become commonplace, but its note of caution is still applicable. The idealisation of indigenous culture, its endowment with redemptive properties and its "portrayal as vehicle of deliverance from our entire hermeneutical malaise" is not a real option for vernacular hermeneutics, even if it allows and stimulates cultural contact with and credibility between interpreters and their indigenous audiences. Vernacular hermeneutics questions the missionary condemnation of indigenous culture, affirming the presence of religious truths in such cultures before the advent or introduction of Christianity. But vernacular hermeneutics cannot ignore that "indigenous cultures carry along with their enlivening aspects a baggage of feudal, patriarchal and anti-egalitarian traditions" (Sugirtharajah 1999a:106-107; cf West 1999:41).

If in hermeneutics the prevailing danger is one of viewing all Western or colonial texts as repressive while all postcolonial texts are taken as being infused with subversive qualities (Gandhi 1998:154), it means that postcolonial criticism cannot claim hermeneutical privilege. What Sugirtharajah claims for a postcolonial Indian context holds true in the South African post-Apartheid context, as well. "The notion that everyone who writes in one of our regional languages and utilizes autochthonous idioms, symbols and ceremonies is always free, emancipated and represents true India, and that those who write in English and use contemporary western modes of interpretation are by contrast always conniving with Anglo-American or Sanskritic imperialism, is too simplistic" (Sugirtharajah 1999:108). It suggests that biblical scholars plying their trade against the backdrop of colonial and Apartheid South Africa, reaching towards postcolonial times should avoid being aggressively self-assured about, as much as being solemnly dismissive of, indigenous cultures.

Explicit and covert attempts to read the Bible beyond or at least outside traditional denominational and ecclesial boundaries as well as other established socio-cultural perimeters, already function as symbolic forms of dissent and resistance, and resemble the post-colonial urge to let the subaltern speak. Such readings ultimately provide a challenge to social

⁵⁴ Which is of course not equivalent to re-establishing (the pretension of) universalism, since the latter often amounts to no less than the dominant cultural values and hierarchy made universal (cf Wan 2000:109).

and ecclesial consensus, normalisation and ideology, through displacement of the texts and their traditional hermeneutics.⁵⁵

Therefore, applying Bhabha's notion of postcolonial literature's "colonial mimicry" to postcolonial biblical studies would entail dealing with the ambivalent mixture of deference and disobedience in the latter. It can also serve to dispel the notion that academic integrity and scientific rigour, elements valued so highly in the academy, are no longer deemed worthy. Indeed, the resultant postcolonial critic becomes a Janus-faced creature, with a split consciousness of double vision. The impossibility of a return to or rediscovery of "an absolute pre-colonial cultural purity" is accompanied by the impossibility of creating "national or regional formations entirely independent of their historical implication in the European colonial enterprise" (Ashcroft et al 1989:195-196). The implications of moving towards postcolonial biblical interpretation as hybridical reading in Southern Africa still need to be established, but the scars of South African Apartheid might still lie too shallow to allow this in the true sense of the word.

Conclusion

Postcolonial biblical studies confirm that interpretation is always influenced by reigning and dominant cultural values, and that all interpretation subscribes to cultural codes, thought-patterns and the social location of its interpreters.⁵⁶ "[W]ithout conscious and committed attention to the entangling of biblical studies and colonial culture, Biblical Studies continue with these foundations, and continues within its colonial legacy" (Peskowitz 1996:180). Like postcolonial studies, postcolonial biblical hermeneutics cannot be content to merely fit into the hegemonic discourses of "the academy", but has to initiate change in structure and content, if not also epistemology.⁵⁷ "[P]ostcolonialism will continue to challenge the context and contours of biblical interpretation, and the existing notions and preconceptions of professional guilds and academics" (Sugirtharajah 1998b:21).

When the focus shifts from an emphasis on nationalism to affirming national consciousness, a number of possibilities present themselves to be explored. For example, can postcolonial biblical criticism allow for the integration of the liberation (Black Theologies) and cultural (African Theologies) foci in approaches to the Bible (and theology) in Africa, to accommodate both suspicion and retrieval, the local/vernacular and global/metropolitan, the indigenous and diaspora, and so on? Can it not also shift the mangled debate about the

⁵⁵ In cultural studies the phenomenon of challenge to social consensus through displacement as symbolic forms of dissent and resistance has been argued with reference to e.g. formations among English working-class youths such as skinheads, rockers, punks and so on (Leitch 1994:281). The "PC" of postcolonial criticism can therefore not afford to covet the status of being or becoming "PC" (politically correct) or to replicate a Hollywood-simulated underdog-becomes-hero style. All romantic(ised) versions of claiming moral justification for attaining or maintaining power or control over people are up for scrutiny, and anti-colonial nationalism can easily become a refuge from facing "internal orthodoxies and injustices". From another angle, Said registers his concern that anti-colonial *critique* might come to replace anti-colonial *resistance*, and in this way inscribe and eventually subscribe to the chauvinism and authoritarianism of the postcolonial nation-state, "itself a conformity-producing prison-house which reverses, and so merely replicates, the old colonial divisions of racial consciousness" (in Gandhi 1998:81).

⁵⁶ Cf the interesting examples from 8th-century Saxon poetry (Germanic chieftainship and Christology), and the more familiar examples of Anselm's atonement theology (with a medieval peasant's insult of the king as the reference), Luther's reinterpretation of justification by faith (in the era of emerging individualism), and Bultmann's existentialist interpretation (reacting to Heideggerian existentialism) (Sugirtharajah 1999:104-105).

⁵⁷ In order to counter the epistemic violence of colonisation. But, "[g]iven its poststructuralist inheritance, recent postcolonial critique tends to favour those varieties of counter-hegemonic anti-colonialisms which subvert rather than reverse the chronic oppositions of colonial discourse" (Gandhi 1998:112).

possibility, advisability and nature of a (to be developed) authentic African hermeneutic, towards the search for elements to be incorporated into an African-infused, hybrid hermeneutic?

Reading the Bible in (South) Africa in a way that allows the voices of the marginalised to be heard while stimulating hybridical interpretations, can guard against falling prey to the unfortunate consequence of those readings against the grain, whose counter-discourse preserves the binary opposition and re-establishes a privileged reading while it seeks to subvert the basis of discriminatory polarity (Sharrad, in Berquist 1996:33). Postcolonial biblical criticism as operational framework for reading the Bible in (South) Africa can easily be perceived as ambivalent, and even ambiguous. Employing vernacular hermeneutics which is context-sensitive, alert to local language and culture, celebrates in postmodern way the local while subverting prevailing foreign theories and practice in postcolonial fashion⁵⁸ (Sugirtharajah 1999b:12). But at the same time it is the postcolonial inclination which will caution vernacular hermeneutics to avoid both the danger of romanticising or idealising the contribution of the marginalised, as well as the danger of minimising and rationalising their contribution to biblical reading. Like all other flesh-and-blood readers, postcolonial readers and their readings too, are local, perspectival, and interested and thus contextualised and ideological (Segovia 1998:52). Postcolonial biblical criticism is neither the obvious nor the impossible choice in (South) Africa, but does require more sustained attention than the isolated traces which are currently found on the scene of local biblical interpretation.

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⁵⁸ Vernacular hermeneutics is naturally characterised and defined by its context(s), since what is vernacular depends on context (Sugirtharajah 1999a:95ff). Especially when indigenes engage in vernacular readings, and since their "ground rules" are different from the *academic* norms and standards, these efforts would often go unappreciated or even unnoticed (cf Sugirtharajah 1999b:12).

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