

# ○ HOMI K. BHABHA AND THE MIXED BLESSING OF HYBRIDITY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

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Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory offers a great potential for a new landscape in the interpretation of the biblical literature that was produced and consumed in the imperial and colonial contexts of antiquity. The notions of hybridity and mimicry Bhabha has elucidated are particularly rich in implication for a revised description of the complex web of political and cultural negotiations in ancient Israel. The fruition of the hermeneutic implications of the problematics of hybridity on biblical studies awaits the formulation of concrete strategies to engage the powers that be in the contemporary still-colonial world.

Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory has been at once *celebrated* for insight and *berated* for incomprehensibility. Bhabha's luminance comes from his uncanny way of mining the complex power relationship involved in the production and consumption of discourses in the contemporary postcolonial world. Like a spirited shaman who turns common words into potent spells of exorcism, Bhabha not only dispels the specter of pure culture with the realism of hybridity, but also spoils the intricate, delectable misunderstanding between the coloniser and the colonised with the image of mimicry, as he draws a new map of the past and the present with the clearing of *some* third space that 'quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force' (Bhabha 1994 p. 37). In the third space the Ralph Ellisonian *invisible* could 'fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present' (p. 12), and write their own history with the 'right to signify' (pp. 231-234). The underdogs of the colonial world can now conceptualise a world governed by dynamics different from those in the neocolonial situation.

Bhabha's incisive strike at the grip of colonial discourse on the past and the present plucked out of the historical continuum is mystified by his impenetrable writing style, which may have been exacerbated by the ethos of the literature department; however, more significantly, the density of his discourse has to do with the complexity – virtually, if not absolutely, impossible to untangle – of the postcolonial deconstruction he advocates. Once the thick layers of his padded sentences are traversed, if not penetrated, the strokes of his postcolonial program do emerge with a dose of ambiguity to suggest a huge sum of potential for exegetical fresh air, especially enticing in the light of the nature of the biblical literature produced and consumed in the colonial context of antiquity.

In biblical studies, the *locus* of the fixation of Torah is commonly dated to the Persian period, in which, as Jon Berquist points out, Yehud was a Persian colony whose condition was determined by the colonial political situation (Berquist 1995). While the traditional historiography of ancient Israel has long been shackled by the paradigmatic juxtaposition of the exilic and postexilic periods, the contemporary scholarship of ancient Israel has debunked successfully the artificial watershed in the temporal continuum. Berquist gives an expression to the persisting colonial grip on Yehud, when he says, 'From this perspective, there is no "exile" (absence of people from the land) followed by "restoration" (a failed goal of return to self-rule in the old fashion, by elites who came from

Babylonia’ (p. 10). The biblical land *almost always* toiled under the colonial grip of the stronger foreign powers, and the biblical corpus was trimmed under the watch and ward of the colonial powers of the ancient Near East.

Bhabha’s beacon offers torrential potential that could open another phase in biblical interpretation through the awareness of the absolute grip of colonial forces at play in antiquity. The new direction his study lifts up is rich in implications for the political responsibility of the present, as well; however, the question remains as to exactly where the new era is to be located, especially with the issue couched in a mixture of the temporal interrogations and the spatial queries. His call for the dismantling of the colonial grip on history, literature, and society, and his prescriptions – effective, even though notoriously illegible – warms the biblical exegete’s heart, yes, *strangely*, but, at the same time, his refreshing recasting of ambivalent hybridity may even conjure *euphoria* where contemporary hermeneutics has often reached *aporia* – an interpretive *cul-de-sac* not all too uncommon in postmodern/postcolonial discourses. In spite of his clear discomfort about leaving the negotiation between theory and politics as an endless interrogatory exercise (Bhabha 1994 pp. 29-31), a pivotal question persists: whether the hybrid blessing can mend the woes in this postcolonial, or to be more precise, this still-colonial world. At the risk of repetition, the question may be redressed for biblical studies: Can Bhabha’s postcolonialism finally uncover the true vision of the biblical past and guide biblical scholars to hear the voices of biblical tradition interested in social change and the *shalom* of high and low, poor and rich, haves and have-nots, and all in between?<sup>1</sup> Or, will it go down the alley of history as a celebrated commodity of what Graham Huggan terms as ‘alterity industry’ in the market of the ‘postcolonial exotic’ (Huggan 2001).

## HOMI BHABA AT HIS BEST AND HYBRIDITY IN BIBLICAL STUDIES

The best behest of Bhabha is passed on in his call for the re-assessment of what used to be taken for granted in previous studies of literature and history. Political discourses had been formulated under the politicised notion of the impervious binary of the coloniser and the colonised,<sup>2</sup> which Bhabha and others expose as a fictional construct concocted to justify the existing structure of domination. Cultures, ancient and modern, had been studied with the premise of forces at work to ward off foreign contamination, even though cultures have always been formed through a plethora of alien elements that came in different times with different people, making it inadvisable to postulate a preferred culture and conclude that one culture is superior to the other. Robert JC Young refers to the methodological tendency toward exclusion in fields of scientific research, when he says, ‘Historically... comparatively little attention has been given to the mechanics of the intricate processes of cultural contact, intrusion, fusion and disjunction. In archaeology, for example, the models have been ones of diffusion, assimilation or isolation, not of interaction or counteraction’ (Young 1995 p. 5). Bhabha’s notion of cultural hybridity reorients the lens in historical studies, so that they ‘may challenge normative expectations of development and progress’ (Bhabha 1994 p. 2). The negotiation of hybridities may well represent a paradigm shift in the contemporary historiography.

Biblical studies has also been conducted with a quasi-ethical evaluation of higher religions configured as undefiled versions in opposition to syncretistic mixtures. The notion of hybridity helps to demolish the myth of pure religion and true theology as value-free categories, and exposes

how power structures have politicised them to advance their agenda of social engineering. Homi Bhabha's postcolonial approach invites responsible readings of biblical literature that challenge and rewrite history and exegesis to right the exploitive past and to write the postcolonial future. Traditional historical-critical approaches to biblical interpretation depended on analysis to separate the object of inquiry from the text, but Bhabha's method would caution that the analytical mode culturally specific to the West has done nothing but 'calm violence' (Foucault) to history (Bhabha 1995 pp. 326-343).<sup>3</sup>

Historical-critical exegesis has been cited facetiously for analysis paralysis, and the unhealthiness has often come from the misdiagnosis that subjected a healthy patient of hybrid identity to a misguided surgical attempt to remove the inherent complexity of history or something that looks like history. Trajectories of biblical traditions have eluded methodological control *in vitro*, for the forces that shape history tend to be hybridised and are not readily sorted out *in vivo*. Nonetheless, thousands of tomes of constructive history and eternity-mimicking theology are now readily available, if not voraciously consulted, on the shelves of theological libraries.

The hybrid nature of the biblical literature may seem to be self-evident under the postcolonial optic, but even a cursory look at the past history of biblical interpretation demonstrates that hybrid situations within biblical accounts have had a troubled history. Theological traditions and laws have often been evaluated under the ideal of a unified people under one God. While God often appears surrounded by other divine beings in many places in the biblical corpus, the hefty Deuteronomic God-alone theology has been proffered as the dominant theme in the so-called biblical theology. As a Swedish theologian B.-E. Benktson comments, however, an isolated God is 'a projection of alienated modern man' (cited in Mettinger 1998 p. 133), and the theology of a lonely God has more to do with the loneliness of modern male theologians than the traditions of the ancient Near East.

Aversion to hybridities is palpable in the investigation of the history of Israel in every phase in the fashion of Foucaultian 'omnipresence of power' (Foucault 1978 p. 93). The study of the premonarchic memory of Israel – whether it reflects an ancient tradition or is a later construct<sup>4</sup> – has often been presented in terms of Canaanite-Israelite binary. The law that prohibits boiling a kid in its mother's milk (Exod 23:19; 34:26; Deut 14:21), which has given rise to the tradition that separates milk and meat, has at times been cited as a case of requiring separation from Canaanite religious practices. In this scenario 'mixed' means 'mess'.

In the Priestly legislation, the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26) mandates separation from the Canaanite religious practices. In the prominently apodictic language, Leviticus 18 stipulates separation from the religious prescriptions of the Canaanites (18:3, *huqqōtēhem*, 'their statutes') at the pain of expulsion from the land. It couches the legal requirements in terms of cultic defilement through the violation of taboos geared toward preservation of purity in family relationships. Leviticus 19 follows to establish 'the assumed connection between pagan worship and sexual degeneracy – both are regarded as the causes of exile' (Levine 1989 p. 135). Laws for ethical and ritual holiness (Leviticus 19, 20-24) then enclose the prominently casuistic language of Leviticus 20, which outlaws the Canaanite worship of Molech along with kinship violations and homosexual practices in the juxtaposition of homophobia and xenophobia (Levine 1989 p. 123).<sup>5</sup>

The narrative tradition of the Hebrew Bible includes an episode of murmuring in the book of Numbers attributed to a group to which the MT gives an incidental, if pejorative, description

of *'asafsf* from the root *'sf*, suggesting a collection of problematic elements (Num 11:4). The LXX renders the ominous *hapax legomenon* as *epimiktos*, a mixed group, enticing many commentators to posit a definable group that came out of Egypt with the Hebrews (cf. Exod 12:38). The same Greek word appears in the LXX book of Nehemiah for the families of mixed marriages ('of foreign descent' in the NRSV translation) Nehemiah targeted for the policy of forced separation as a violent measure to reconstitute the pure Yehud (Neh 13:4). The repeated attempts to sustain the ideology of one people – each with its own political agenda – have created a general notion that the biblical tradition contains a unified policy statement that prescribes appropriate marital relationships by excluding contact with others in the region and other religions.

Alongside the mandate of separation, the under-voiced side of the biblical literature suggests another discursive exercise not categorically opposed to the formation of identity through 'a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moment of historical trans-formation' (Bhabha 1994 p. 2). Apart from the ongoing debate on the date of Israel's origins, the assembly at Shechem in Joshua 24 suggests that early Israel was a mixed group from beyond the Euphrates and the Nile.<sup>6</sup> In the Solomonic Period, the Temple of Jerusalem is constructed by the joint efforts of Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders – the Phoenician (foreign!) skilled hands (1 Kings 5:32; ET 5:18). Timber and *timbre* for the Temple came from Tyre. Centuries later, in a most celebrated case of religious purification, King Josiah went out and demolished the high places as part of his Deuteronomistic reform in the seventh century. While Josiah's royal policy of religious purge represents an ethos of an exclusive religion, one must wonder what these local sanctuaries were doing in the first place all over Judah and what had been Israel. Other pieces of literature that challenge the particularistic tendency in Israel include the book of Ruth, the book of Jonah, and so-called Third Isaiah (Bright 1981 pp. 442-446).<sup>7</sup> These intermittent voices of hybridities bear testimony to the presence of social protest in the biblical literature against the forces that attempt to shape social order in terms of the so-called unadulterated purity of religion and culture.

Repeated discourses that problematise crosscultural fertilisation also render additional support to the thesis that cultural negotiation was a highly energising issue in biblical times. Homi Bhabha's call for the recognition of hybridity in the postcolonial identity takes biblical scholars to task, as the biblical world reveals itself replete with hybrid situations and contexts.

## COUNTING BLESSINGS

As one of the colossal blessings Homi Bhabha brings to biblical studies, the notion of hybridity makes it not only possible but also imperative to rewrite the history and theology of Israel – or perhaps the entire landscape of biblical interpretation. The re-presentation of the history of Israel from such an optic is a task that bears and nurses the yearning of silenced voices that were previously denied access to discursive representation. It goes without saying that the same concern that Gayatri Spivak voiced for the subaltern who were not permitted to speak (Spivak 1988 pp. 271-313) should impact the shape of the revised history of Israel.

In the revisionist history under his aegis, it is Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity that can introduce a new set of rules of narration. He identifies fluid identity as the major battleground in postcolonial negotiation, and clears the table of discussion with the declaration that identity is a mixed, boundary-crossing category. Cultures that came together in the land of Canaan in

the colonial and imperial matrix of the ancient Near East also were not merely diverse, but different. Diversity, a major category in multiculturalism, calls for harmony, but it is naïveté to think that human societies could achieve cultural harmony, which presupposes delineable cultural boundaries, which can in turn only be obtained by the master's preemptive historiography – like the Gospel according to Pharaoh. The third space Bhabha envisions makes it possible to re-read the text and to re-write the interpretation of the text forged in a world of many different – not just diverse – cultures. In this connection, his postcolonial optic calls for a politically responsible reading through 'the negotiation of cultural difference in a way that is liberating for those caught in oppressive situations' (Runions 2001 p. 75) in the light of the '*possibility of resituating the subject through the negotiation of cultural difference*' (p. 76; italics hers).

The origin of Israel is accurately and fruitfully understood as a hybrid process in which different groups came together and formulated a hybrid response to the challenges faced in life. Hybridity continues from the premonarchic era down to the colonial entanglements of the first millennium BCE, and takes different shapes, as well as different ingredients.

Scholars who have tackled the reconstruction of the premonarchic history from the perspective of social-scientific criticism have described the process of the settlement of Israel in Canaan in Marxist terms – in terms of the conflict between the tributary mode of production and the communitarian mode of production (Gottwald 1979). In the ideological topography redrawn from Bhabha's perspective of hybridity, one may recast the whole project resulting in an amalgamation of various competing modes of production, instead of presenting the exodus as a triumph of the communitarian cause. The paradigm of hybridity facilitates a more balanced historiography than previous scholarship has managed to produce, for a revolution that resulted in a pure communitarian mode of production is found neither in antiquity nor in (post)modernity.

The most celebrated period of the United Monarchy saw many cultures being amalgamated to form an empire; in this time the kingdom of Israel itself was the coloniser. Hybridity may account for some of the surge in political and cultural energy that was large enough to provide room for both encomium of royal achievements and subtle protest for the court scribes or wisdom teachers in this period.<sup>8</sup> The Yahwist, a theoretical construct posited to explain the composite nature of the Torah, makes a near-perfect illustration. Many historical critical scholars have read the myth of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 as propagating the notion of all human beings descending from one set of parents in order to regroup the diverse groups of people under the one imperialistic regime of the United Monarchy (von Rad 1962–1965).<sup>9</sup> Using mythical images of the same parents for all peoples, however, the Yahwist, who is clearly part of the establishment, may have been satirical at the same time about the monarchic system, as James Kennedy suggests in his allegorical interpretation of Genesis 2-3 (Kennedy 1990 pp. 3-14). Kennedy recasts the story of Adam and Eve as the story of peasants placed to take care of the manor of the king represented by Yahweh.<sup>10</sup> Yahweh's prohibition concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil is metaphor for the king's exclusive claim to determine what is good and what is evil. Adam and Eve, the peasants, are assisted by a serpent, a demagogue who enables them to discern the structure of domination. They revolt, only to be cracked down upon and expelled from the king's land. In a mode similar to Bhabha's notion of mimicry, which creates a '*double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority*' (Bhabha 1994 p. 88; italics his) the subversive Yahwist mimics the rhetoric of the best world under royal control, but that

mimicry portrays a picture of a nervous land owner, the king in the Lacanian camouflage. While the regime has worked to mold a leadership in support of the throne, the court scribes, as they mimic traditional discourses, may not have been entirely supportive of the ruling powers. The United Monarchy had the latitude to permit such a clandestine carnival of political protest on the part of Yahwist, an otherwise loyal subject in the monarchic polity of ancient Israel.

Other scribes and wisdom teachers who have offered proverbs may also have been practicing mimicry as they pose themselves as affirming the existing structure while satirising the erratic behavior of kings. 'A wise king winnows the wicked, and drives the wheel over them' (Prov 20:26) could not only be read as the royal passion for justice but also as the royal obsession over control and the royal propensity toward cruelty. Prov 30:27, which states 'the locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank', may have been just as much a political commentary on the unneeded, unwanted monarchy as an entomological observation of some smart locusts. The sage conjugates the traditional rhetoric of wisdom, when he says, 'Three things are stately in their stride, four are stately in their gait: the lion...; the strutting rooster, the he-goat, and a king...' (Prov 30:29-31). This interpretive approach to the book of Proverbs can reshape the interpretive landscape around the wisdom of antiquity.

In a comparable fashion, Homi Bhabha's mimicry deconstructs the absolute grip of royal power on the life of the people and opens a space that makes it possible to raise a subtle voice of protest. Bhabha calls the space that enables one to dream and design a new world 'third space', 'in-between space', or, borrowing Emmanuel Levinas, 'interstice'. These terms are partly an indictment on the optimism of progress in knowledge to be a force that dismantles the structure of colonial domination. A Bhabhaistic liberating exegesis does not come from mere adjustments of any current space but from the creation of a new space. Bhabha's third space demonstrates that history cannot simply be revised; it needs to be reinscribed from a new location.

Homi Bhabha's category of hybridity is highly useful for understanding the cultural background of biblical literature and has the potential as a hermeneutic corrective to the assumed purity of the so-called critical approaches. From Bhabha to Bible one finds that it is not just the contemporary world that is hybrid.<sup>11</sup> Ancient cultures were also hybridised. Some of the most flourishing times of culture in Israel were an ambivalent time of interwoven cultures, such as the United Monarchy under David and Solomon, the reign of the Omride Dynasty, and most remarkably the hybrid subjectivities that bloomed in the exile and thereafter. In contrast, the uncertain course of cultural negotiation is perceived to be an extreme threat in the postexilic era when the community is struggling with meager resources to redefine their identity as Israel and reconstitute a definable people in the shadow of Persia.

## **DISCOUNTING BLESSINGS**

While hybridity is an accurate description of the world, both ancient and modern, its ubiquity in Bhabha's system may be damaging to its efficacy as an incisive tool of historical description. He lifts hybridity as a model of a postcolonial blind spot, but hybridity has more to do with human reality than postcolonial identity. Furthermore, the structure of oppression has been sustained not because no one has been able to see the reality of hybridity but because political leaders and religious leaders or peddlers of knowledge and power have used it as one of the tools of political control, counting it as something that needs to be corrected by the intervention of

rightful powers. Other excuses for political legitimatisation include the divine election, control over moral laxity, maintenance of social order, and the value of rightful lineage. Among the legitimising strategies of power, the foray of hybridity may have been particularly attractive because it appears to reduce the number of factors the force in power (colonisers, actual or symbolic) had to control.

To deconstruct the problematics of hybridity is certainly another ‘giant leap for mankind [sic]’ toward correcting the misconception of the value attached to the constructs of purity. Postcolonial critical theory received a shot in the arm in 1994, when many of Homi K. Bhabha’s essays were collected together in the unified volume, *The Location of Culture*.<sup>12</sup> He clearly presents a possibility of a postcolonial new *unheimlich* configuration as one of the goals of studying history in *The Location of Culture*. The significance the essays had in their previous manifestation is consistently augmented by their physical assembly into an edited whole. As Homi Bhabha’s chapters appear one after the other under the same cover, however, the reader may be tempted to expect some definite answer to unfold in the subsequent chapters, only to find that the answer is postponed.

Homi Bhabha does invest a great deal of thought in the potential of resistance in mimicry as ‘one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge’ (Bhabha 1994 p. 85). Since mimicry means that the master’s instruction is not fully fulfilled, there is a ridicule factor. ‘[Q]uite contrary to the “intention” of the colonizer, in that mimicry produces subjects whose “not-quite sameness” acts like a distorting mirror which fractures the identity of the colonizing subject’ (Moore-Gilbert 1997 p. 121). Concerning the materiality of the resistance in postcolonial discourse, however, Anthony Easthope asks: ‘Is the resistance Bhabha detects in colonialist discourse a sign of the active resistance of the colonized? Or is the ambivalence in fact an effect which could be detected in any text, but has been tracked down in the colonialist text by Bhabha himself? (Easthope 2002. p. 52). More bluntly, does mimicry really represent a conscious social protest? Both in the East and in the West mimicry is involved in a major means of pedagogical assimilation, and often is dubbed *mimesis*. What then makes mimicry a performative act of protest and resistance?’

In lieu of any clear answer to the question, there is a hopeless solipsism in mimicry. Only those who have been well acculturated in the dominant structure could pull off mimicry effectively with a tint of protest. There is even a certain self-congratulatory aspect to calling this mimicry a political theory. Those who had the privilege to learn the master’s discourses can now claim a clear conscience. Mimicry in colonial times is a mixed category that is made up of survival mechanisms, opportunism, fascination, messiah-complex, and many other elements of intellectual laundry. To call mimicry a measure of subtle protest has the danger of beautifying the meager discomfort retrospectively into a noble act of resistance. It is a case of the commentary that improves the text; as a Korean proverb says, ‘Always better than the dream is its interpretation’.

For a sober interpretation from a postcolonial perspective, Homi Bhabha posits a third space, which is some kind of ‘in between’ space between the negotiators and the negotiated. But exactly what is in between except empty space? Exactly who has access to that desirable, ethereal real estate? His programmatic question asks: ‘How are subjects formed in between, or in excess of, the sum of the parts of difference?’ (Bhabha 1994 p. 2) Does the in-between space aid the situations

of the people who belong to no place – the uprooted, subalterns, dalits, vagabonds, and the expendable in Gerhard Lenski's paradigm of social stratification? (Lenski 1984).

As the chapters in *The Location of Culture* repeat a promise of an elusive third space, the reader is constantly told to keep on looking for the space. Bhabha emphatically speaks of social change, but the contours of the change are not laid out specifically. One has only to suspect that it is hidden in the complicated arguments Bhabha articulated in *The Location of Culture*. To draw up any plan of change may be premature and even oppressive in that it preempts the voice of the people. Yet, the lack of clear statements makes it impossible to respond to the political change his hermeneutic vision is calling for, let alone offer tools to assess it. While it does not spell out the kind of change it would advocate, it tends to create an illusion that merely posits the possibilities of change without ever specifying what form the change should take.

Even if one grants that it is a mode of protest, does mimicry seek an out-and-out social change? Bhabha often mentions the word 'resistance' as deconstructionists habitually do; however, what form and goal of resistance is in view? Perhaps, for the sake of argument, it might be useful to distinguish protest from resistance. Protest calls for a social change, but usually within the current social resources; resistance pursues the change of the master. Postcolonial struggle has undoubtedly included struggles of rigorous opposition, but do postcolonial protests of mimicry necessarily translate into resistance? Or, will the answer to that question remain, in parody of Bhabha (1994 p. 91), 'almost but not quite'?<sup>13</sup>

The world is indebted to Homi Bhabha for lifting up the interstitial space or imagining the possibility of it; however, the third space he has carved up as 'in-between' and served as 'beyond' may be as elusive as a desert mirage or even, perhaps, outlandish enough to be beyond reality altogether. One is left to deal with the still-colonial world. Bhabha's third space is a liberating category, but until it is secured, it may remain only a telling commentary of the homeless state of the postcolonial, who has been driven out of his or her own first space and told to find a third space without traversing a second space, which now really sounds like quantum physics.

## **RECOUNTING BLESSINGS**

To shy away from Bhabha's 'babelian performance' (Bhabha 1994 p. 135)<sup>14</sup> and to give up on social changes altogether would recall the proverbial admonition against a hermeneutics of despair. His perspective helps to uncover the burden of the illusion of past exegesis, and suggests the possibility of finding new ways to describe what has transpired. It even invigorates the exegetical discussion, exposing that there is no neutral reading. Every reading, which is neither void of ideology nor free of impact, affects social change in one way or the other, and an interpreter should be aware of certain social obligations that come with the act of interpretation.

For postcolonial interpreters, the notion of hybridity heralds that they will now face a greater challenge than that encountered in the days of anti-colonialism. There is no longer a place that may be described as 'behind enemy lines,' not because Jesus' love command has been successful, but because there is no longer an enemy line that helps to tell friend from foe. For post-colonial criticism to be relevant, it has to make its strategy and objective clear. Instead of claiming what could be interpreted as measures of protest by means of abstruse sentences, postcolonial posture has to introduce a straightforward engagement with colonial powers.



One cannot afford to miss Bhabha's call to reclaim the discursive right, as he postulates that theory alone, couched in poetic density, has the power to bring about political changes (Bhabha 1994 pp. 18-28). Best and Kellner call for the kind of theory that helps to unravel today's world, when they say, 'Mapping contemporary social, political, and cultural reality requires development of a strong macro social theory built firmly on historical and empirical analysis of the present age' (Best and Kellner 1991 p. 301). Revolutionary change from literary criticism is rare in spite of sporadic claims otherwise, but is not impossible.

## ONCE FOR ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

Many *avant-garde* projects have trodden the proverbial path of morphing into a voice of the establishment. One may find postcolonial discourses having already become part of the dominant discourses in modern world, too. Postcolonial approach, with its ambiguous in-between hybridity, may be even more vulnerable to the same critique than other theoretical protests as well as to charges of no roadmap for social change. As Leela Gandhi observes:

Postmodern/poststructuralist commentators argue that postcolonialism is in danger of becoming yet another totalizing method and theory. On the other side, Marxist and materialist critics have vociferously made the charge that postcolonial analysis lacks the methodological structure, and will to totalize, necessary for right thinking and left politics (Gandhi 1998 p. 167).

Perhaps unfairly, fairly, or somewhere in between, Bhabha has been suspected of elitism, but he makes an important 'distinction... between the institutional history of critical theory and its conceptual potential for change and innovation' (Bhabha 1994 p. 31). While Bhabha does not rush to devise a plan for a radical restructuring of society, he has provided a set of terms to portray the contemporary world in a more sober manner than ever.

Even after Bhabha, however, the dismantling of the colonial structure is far from actualised. There must have been a good reason for the apocalyptic writers at the end of the Old Testament period to posit their new world on the other side of history (*jenseits*) and never to claim that the humans would be able to build the eschatological reign of God. The apocalyptic temporal space is to be brought by the divine, and one can only welcome it. Any effort to build a kingdom (whether politically or ideologically) runs the risk of becoming its own oppression, depriving the future of what it could bring.

Homi Bhabha dreams of relocating to this side of history (*diesseits*) the materialisation of what the ancient apocalyptists hoped for – 'to touch the future on its hither side' (Bhabha 1994 p. 7). A dream is an elusive reality, and can be blissful, as long as the dreamer does not wake up, as the ancient Chinese sage Chuang-Tzu experienced and explicated (II.1.ii.11). While 'we have been trapped in our own history' (Foucault quoted by Young 1995 p. 28) and while postmodern conviviality continues its rap into the night, the postcolonial question of conviviality persists and two thirds of the world crane forward to what the ancient Hebrew prophets described as *shalom*, a familiar word virtually, if not absolutely, impossible to translate into the English language. The night of colonial grip is still young (temporal), and the dawn of peace and justice is far (spatial). The birth pangs of a post-colonial world have continued much too long, and the promise of the baby has long passed the due date.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Biblical studies over the last several decades has seen the flowering of seminal treatment of the socio-political reality of the Fertile Crescent from the postcolonial optic, whose proponents include Pui-lan Kwok, Fernando F. Segovia. R. S. Sugirtharajah et al, though at times they seem somewhat oblivious to the indebtedness to the traditional critical methods that facilitate their deconstruction of the historical critical exegesis, risking the danger of remaining as an intradiscourse of the academia. Some of the most important works in postcolonial exercise include *Discovering the Bible in the Non-biblical World* by Pui-lan Kwok (1995); *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* by Fernando F. Segovia (2000); *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* by R.S. Sugirtharajah (2002); and *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* by R.S. Sugirtharajah (2003).
- 2 Cf. Michel Foucault, who argues that ‘there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations... One must suppose rather that the manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups, and institutions, are the basis for wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole’ (Foucault 1978 p. 94).
- 3 Bhabha borrows the phrase from Michel Foucault (1970). He laments that Foucault’s ‘calm violence’ fails to assign an adequate role for the colonial history, but proceeds to postulate that Foucault’s forgetful discourse can facilitate the launch of the postcolonial text. See also Bhabha 1994 p. 196.
- 4 For the view that approaches ancient Israel as a later historical construct, see Niels Peter Lemke (1988) and Philip R. Davies (1992).
- 5 Levine points further to Genesis 19 and Judges 19, in which ‘the form of attack was homosexual assault’.
- 6 The corollary of this observation is that the framework of the tribes of Israel in the Hebrew Bible is a later historian’s feat of integrating various roots of Israel (Engel 1979 p. 157).
- 7 Cf. T. Naph 8:3; T. Benj 10:10; Eccl. 10:19-22 for postbiblical motifs of the inclusion of Gentiles in God’s economy.
- 8 For an interesting case of analogy one may recall Charles Darwin, who recorded in *The Origin of Species* that the hybrids were ‘perfectly fertile’ (I, 26).
- 9 The casting out of the Garden in Genesis 3 puts in doubt the association of the Yahwist source with the glory of the monarchy, and the jarring note on the expulsion has led some revisionists to posit the exilic date for the Yahwist altogether (John Blenkinsopp 1992 p. 66; John Van Seters 1992 pp. 107-129). See also Lothar Perlitt (1969), John Van Seters (1975), Hans Heinrich Schmid (1976) for the late dating of the Yahwist on different grounds.
- 10 Kenney does not limit his interpretation to the United Monarchy, as the allegory he proposes would apply to any monarchic period.
- 11 Angelica Bammer, editor, *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question* logs the paths of modern dislocations as formative forces of constructed cultural identities (Bammer 1994). In the Afterwords (‘Frontlines/Borderposts’, pp. 269-272) he contributed to the volume, Bhabha extols the ‘move away from the singularities of “class” or “gender” as primary conceptual and organizational categories’ (p. 269).
- 12 Interestingly enough, the introductory chapter of ‘Locations of Culture’ presages a more multifaceted object of exploration (or even objects in the plural) than the title of the book may suggest. In another place where he participates in the struggle over the problem of narrating the national life, Bhabha declares, ‘... the problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new ‘people’ in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the

- political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation' (Bhabha 1990 p. 4).
- 13 Bhabha uses the phrase to depict the ambivalence of mimicry. See also p. 89.
- 14 Bhabha borrows the phrase from Jacques Derrida for 'a figurative transference of meaning across language systems' (Bhabha 1994 p. 135).

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