

the other way round. It is, for instance, wrong to argue that Paul must have meant or must not or could not have meant certain things because he was a Christian. He never said that he was a Christian — and what does “Christian” mean anyway? All of this, in my opinion, is a matter of promoting courageous as well as imaginative scholarship, unfettered by any dogma of the past. It is even more an issue of human rights. First of all are those who were unfairly and unjustly treated during their lifetime and whose memory was tainted if not entirely wiped out. This has been and still is the noblest business of historical criticism maintained by the author of *In Memory of Her*. Speaking up for those who had been and are victims of an unjust history and its power systems has been and is the mission of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. This essay argues that the gnostics of the past belong to those who were and are not allowed to defend themselves and are looking for defenders today who are ready to speak not only for the victims of today but also for those who are dead already and have their memory distorted or even stricken. Our future and that of our children depends on such courageous and imaginative interference with the distortion and liquidation of memory. Such disfiguring and purging of memory was and is an essential element in the continuous process of corrupting the present and the past for the purpose of manipulating the future for the benefit of those who hold the reins of power now. Historians are called upon to resist and resurrect.

Feminist Scholarship and Postcolonial Criticism

Subverting Imperial Discourse and Reclaiming Submerged Histories

Richard A. Horsley

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, outstanding biblical interpreter and theologian, has become the most prominent New Testament scholar in recent times insisting on the political engagement and public accountability of biblical interpretation. She inspired, informed, and mentored a whole new generation of feminist biblical scholarship. Throughout her articulation of a feminist hermeneutic of liberation, moreover, she points out persistently that power relations of gender are closely interrelated with other political-economic power relations and that gender is generally constructed to sustain the multiple interrelated structures of domination that sustain the prevailing sexual, racial, political-economic, and cultural-religious distribution of power. Among biblical scholars, she is the most conversant with broader feminist scholarship and closely related areas of investigation. In writing an essay in honor of Elisabeth I aim to follow her lead in reading more widely than I have previously, particularly among third-world feminist critics and what has come to be called postcolonial criticism, in order to explore these interrelated power relations in New Testament literature and its historical context.

Deconstructing Dominant Discourse to Recover Submerged Peoples' Struggles

Feminist scholars generally, like Schüssler Fiorenza and others in the New Testament field, have been instrumental in widening the recognition that academic scholarship, like culture more generally, is not a closed sphere of life, separate from and innocent of politics and power. Scholarship is not merely the production of knowledge about particular subjects, but is

itself a discursive political practice. Insofar as previously dominant scholarship in various fields obscured or completely hid women under generic androcentric concepts, feminist scholarship mounted disruptive interventions into the general hegemonic discourse of academe. Feminist scholarship in various fields challenged, resisted, and partially replaced the dominant imperial forms of knowledge/power. Insofar as feminist scholarship is generated within Western academe, which it challenges, resists, and subverts, it is also implicated in the continuing domination of other peoples by Western forms of knowledge. Yet having mounted an effective challenge to dominant forms of knowledge/power in one important respect, feminist scholarship and theory, such as that of Schüssler Fiorenza in New Testament studies, can serve as a model for expansion of the challenge to those dominant forms of knowledge/power in other respects.

In the last few decades non-Western feminists, finally getting a hearing in the West, are making unavoidably clear how scholars embedded in Western-generated academic fields still engage in cultural colonization by distorting, appropriating, or even submerging and eliding non-Western women's lives and history.¹ These critiques by non-Western feminists parallel and overlap other non-Western scholars' "postcolonial" criticism of Western cultural production for its construction of the world according to its imperial interests. While sometimes striking for its failure to attend to issues of gender and class, postcolonial criticism attempts to challenge dominant discourses and master narratives in order to recover previously submerged histories. In this regard it is important to listen to the voices of non-Western feminist scholars and postcolonial critics in other fields. And Schüssler Fiorenza shows the way toward fuller inclusion of precisely these concerns in pressing the agenda of feminist interpretation more comprehensively in the field of biblical studies.

In a significant critical review of Western (feminist) treatments of Third World women up to about twenty years ago, Chandra Mohanty argues that "the [analytic] assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic, or racial location" served to perpetuate rather than challenge Western imperial cultural domination.² Over against ahistorical classifications such as "Arab women" or "African women," she calls for attention to the material reality of particular local groups of women and the consideration of interrelated factors in power relations. Correspondingly, Mohanty objects to abstract

1. E.g., Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (ed. Chandra Mohanty et al.; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 51–80; cited from the version repr. in *Contemporary Post-colonial Theory: A Reader* (ed. Padmini Mongia; London/New York: Arnold, 1996), 172–97; and Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, "Challenging Imperial Feminism," *Feminist Review* 17 (1984): 3–19.

2. Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," 175, 183.

generalizations such as "the Arab familial system" or "the Islamic code" without further attention to particular social situations, relations, and locations.³ The implication is that a separate singular patriarchal kinship system or legal code is what constitutes another separate and given entity, women, as oppressed: "Arabs and Muslims, it appears, don't change at all. Their patriarchal family is carried over from the times of the prophet Mohammed. They exist, as it were, outside history."⁴ Western Orientalism thus, for example, obscures the lives of particular groups of Iranian Shi'ite women, the situation they were forced into precisely by the CIA's overthrow of the elected reformist government of Mosaddeq in 1953 and the United States' sponsorship of the Shah's forced capitalist "development" and Westernization programs in the 1960s and 1970s and the remarkable role that both Western-educated middle-class women and their lower-class sisters in Tehran and elsewhere played in the revolution of 1979.⁵ Western academic discourse robs particular groups of women of their historical political agency. Similarly, Marnia Lazreg suggests that it is virtually an academic ritual for scholars to appeal "to religion as the cause of gender inequality just as it is made the cause of underdevelopment in much of modernization theory."⁶

Mohanty insists instead that women are not so much subject to some kinship system or code as they are produced through particular political, economic, and social relations. Women are also implicated in forming and participating in those relations, such that their activities acquire meaning through concrete social interactions.⁷ It simply perpetuates the Orientalism that submerges and denies women's history, for example, to "treat Islam as an ideology separate from and outside social relations and practices, rather than a discourse which includes rules for economic, social, and power relations within society."⁸ Instead of perpetuating a discourse in which women are defined as objects outside social relations, we could rather examine how women are constituted through and act in social relations.⁹ Mohanty calls for a "mode of local, political analysis which generates theoretical

3. *Ibid.*, 177.

4. *Ibid.*, 181.

5. Brief summary with references in Richard A. Horsley, "Religion and Other Products of Empire," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71 (2003), 13–44.

6. Marnia Lazreg, "Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria," *Feminist Issues* 14 (1988): 87.

7. Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," 179.

8. Mina Modares, "Women and Shi'ism in Iran," *mlf* 5–6 (1981): 61–82. For a sophisticated analysis of how Western imperial forms of knowledge and culture and both misogynist and feminist politics are implicated in Muslim women's struggles in and against the power relations in which they have been situated, see Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and idem, "Sartorial Fabrications," in *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse* (ed. Laura Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan; London: Routledge, 2002), 44–61.

9. Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," 190.

categories from within the situation and context being analyzed" and results in "careful, historically specific generalizations responsive to complex realities."¹⁰ Reflecting on another Western intellectual product, the postcolonialism that opposed social theory that employed general categories such as gender, race, and class, some of the more critical Western feminist theorists also insist upon "theory that would be explicitly historical, attuned to the cultural specificity of different societies and periods and to that of different groups, . . . comparativist rather than universalizing, . . . treating gender as one relevant strand among others [such as class and race]."¹¹ With more concrete reference, other Western feminist theorists argue that, insofar as the world capitalist system, particularly in colonial situations, transformed the household in accordance with its needs to extract labor, feminist theory and political strategy must critically consider how so-called traditional patriarchal relationships may be effected by that system, as mediated by state policy.¹²

Like other Western-developed academic fields, New Testament studies has been "colonialist." The field is full of essentialist constructs, universalist generalizations, and abstract dichotomies that obscure or simply submerge ancient women in virtually any circumstances, and particular groups and movements in particular locations. The field even has its equivalent of Orientalism in the fundamental essentialist modern construct of Judaism, Western Christianity's other, often dichotomized with the equally essentialist Hellenism. Simply to add women back into the New Testament and "mix and stir" still leaves intact a field that obscures and submerges women's lives and struggles. It also leaves intact an essentialist Judaism as the field's other. Schüssler Fiorenza was one of the first to caution against the demonization of Judaism and to insist on deconstruction of such essentialisms in a more critical investigation of overlapping factors in systems of domination. It was precisely to comprehend how ancient Mediterranean patriarchy was embedded in the wider Greco-Roman political-economic power relations, of course, that Schüssler Fiorenza coined the concept of *kyriarchy*.

10. *Ibid.*, 184, 188.

11. Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson, "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism," in *Feminism/Postmodernism* (ed. Linda J. Nicholson; London: Routledge, 1990), 19–37, quotation at 34. Micaela de Leonardo, "Introduction: Gender, Culture, and Political Economy: Feminist Anthropology in Historical Perspective," in *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era* (ed. Micaela de Leonardo; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 17–27, 30–31, provides a similar criticism of poststructuralism/postmodernism as problematic for more comprehensive feminist analysis, along with a parallel agenda for feminist investigations and interpretation.

12. Joan Smith, "The Creation of the World We Know: The World-Economy and the Re-creation of Gendered Identities," in *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminism in International Perspective* (ed. Valentine M. Moghadam; Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994), 27–41; and June Nash, "Cultural Parameters of Sexism and Racism in the International Division of Labor," in *Racism, Sexism, and the World-System* (ed. Joan Smith et al.; New York: Greenwood, 1988), 11–36.

It should be possible to follow the lead of Schüssler Fiorenza in further deconstructing the dominant discourse and grand narrative of established New Testament studies in order to recover submerged histories/struggles of groups of women involved in various "Jesus movements." Like postcolonial reclamation of people's histories, over against the grand narrative of our field (Christianity superseding Judaism), we can investigate the life situation and resisting struggles of women involved in local (Roman Palestinian) political, economic, and social power relations. Admittedly our sources are limited in the extreme. Nevertheless, as postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak suggests, we can adapt the Gramscian maxim — "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will" — by combining a philosophical skepticism about recovering any subaltern agency with a political commitment to representing as conscientiously as possible the situation and perspective of multiply oppressed people.¹³

The Village-Based Social Renewal Movement Addressed/Articulated in Mark's Gospel

Once we cease reading the Gospel of Mark through the dominant discourse of established New Testament studies it reads like a story of Galilean and other peoples' struggle for renewal of their community life under the recently established Roman imperial order in Palestine.¹⁴ It is impossible to separate the gender, class, and ethnic aspects of power relations present in the narrative, suggesting that those aspects not be separated in what must be multidisciplinary analysis. The risk, of course, is that specifically feminist analysis and interpretation may be blunted or even resubordinated. The hope, however, is to discern both ways in which multiple forms of oppressive power relations work in the *kyriarchy* of Roman Palestine and ways in which women formed a sustained movement of resistance in assertion of their own agenda of societal renewal.

Only in the grand narrative of Western Christian theology is Mark the story of the origin of a universal spiritual and largely Gentile religion of Christianity from the overly political religion of Judaism obsessed with its parochial law. Most of the story focuses on Jesus' mission among villagers of Galilee as well as villagers beyond Galilee in the territories of Tyre, Caesarea Philippi, and the Decapolis. In contrast to upper, particularly priestly, classes, for whom ethnic and purity boundary definitions would have held considerable importance, cultural differences would have far less importance

13. Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg; Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 308; Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 234.

14. The following is based on the more extensive analysis in Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001).

for Galilean and nearby peasantries than the political-economic subordination and exploitation to which they were all subjected under the Roman imperial order. Indeed, cultural difference, like the political-economic division, was mainly between the village communities and the newly built cities housing the palatial residences and the tax-gathering administrations of the Roman-educated client rulers such as Antipas and Herod Philip. The episode telling of how the prophet of covenant renewal, John the Baptist, was executed mocks the dehumanizing practices (the kyriarchal lasciviousness as well as the cavalier violence) of the royal court. In the middle of the story, Jesus and his followers exhibit a rather free movement back and forth between villages apparently rooted in Israelite tradition and those who are not already "children" (of Israel). In the only episode in which someone bests Jesus in debate, the Greek-speaking Syrophenician woman insists, against Jesus' own parochialism, that other peoples also receive the blessings of healing now available in Jesus' mission (Mark 7:24-30).

Much of Jesus' teaching and healing/exorcism takes place in synagogues, which were local assemblies of the villages in Galilee, not the houses of worship of "Judaism," which had not yet developed in Palestine as a religion.¹⁵ The father of the twelve-year-old woman close to death (whose name "Jairus" is not mentioned in early manuscripts) is not a "ruler" of the Jews, but the chairperson or head of such a local assembly. There is no sharp division between a "Jewish" and a "Gentile" side of the Sea of Galilee. As Judean historian Josephus states (*Antiquities* 13.318-19), Galilee and Galileans had been taken over by the Hasmonean high priestly regime in Jerusalem/Judea in 104 B.C.E., little more than a generation before the Romans took control of the whole area of Palestine and Syria.¹⁶ Judeans, unmentioned in the story except for the Roman crucifixion of Jesus as "king of the Judeans," apparently live in Judea, in which Jerusalem is situated, down from which the scribes and Pharisees come to challenge Jesus. Mark's story thus does not portray Jesus or Jesus' movement as opposing or breaking away from Judaism. The dominant division in the story is rather between rulers, the Romans and their Herodian and high priestly clients in Jerusalem and Sepphoris or Tiberias, on the one hand, and villagers in Galilee and surrounding territories, on the other, as compounded by the regional difference between Galilee and Jerusalem.

The conflict between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees in Mark's Gospel is not over "the Jewish law" so much as over which or whose version of

Israelite tradition Jesus and the Galileans observe.¹⁷ In episodes throughout the story, Jesus speaks as representative of the popular Israelite tradition and covenantal commandment of God over against the Pharisees, who accuse Jesus and his followers of not obeying the official tradition, which includes "the traditions of the elders" as well as Deuteronomist law, both apparently based in Jerusalem. Thus, for example, Jesus insists on observance of the covenantal commandment of God to "honor your father and mother," keeping local economic resources in local families as economic support for the elderly, against the scribes' and Pharisees' demand that local economic resources be "devoted" to God (*korban*) in support of the temple in Jerusalem (Mark 7:1-13). And Jesus insists on the inviolability of marriage as the central bond of the family that constituted the fundamental social-economic unit of the people, thus also guaranteeing women's economic rights, against the Pharisees' liberalization of divorce based on Deut 24:1-4, which facilitated consolidation of landholdings for the Herodian and other elite, but undermined the economic security of women and children (10:2-9).¹⁸

At key points in Mark's story women play representative and instrumental roles. Particularly in the juxtaposition of women in positive roles over against the twelve disciples as paradigms of misunderstanding and lack of faith, women appear to be the models of what the movement is about.¹⁹ In their interwoven stories, the woman who has been hemorrhaging for *twelve* years and the *twelve*-year-old woman (whose father is head of a village assembly) are not simply individuals, but figures representative of Israel, which is being bled under the Roman imperial order and indeed is virtually dead. Through the hemorrhaging woman's own trusting initiative, she is healed, while the young woman who is dying just as she reaches child-bearing age is restored to life, presumably including reproductive power.

The episodes of the story presumably are interrelated, therefore to be heard together. Closely related to the situation of particular women and of the people generally, as represented by these two women, therefore, is the collective trauma suggested in the one Mary's provenance, Magdala. As Josephus reports, in 52 B.C.E. Galileans in the area of Magdala/Tarichaeae, like those in the area of Nazareth two generations later in 4 B.C.E., had experienced severe military violence and mass enslavement at the hands of

17. The points in this paragraph are argued more fully in Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, chaps. 7 and 9.

18. This observation should not be misunderstood as a reversion to the Christian anti-Judaism about which Schüssler Fiorenza and other feminist scholars caution. To modern liberal individualists, Mark's Jesus may appear as a "conservative," while the Pharisees are the "liberals." My principal concern is to take into account the effects of the political-economic-religious kyriarchy of ancient Roman Palestine.

19. Fuller presentation is given in Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, chap. 9, which in turn is heavily dependent on Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 316-23.

15. For a preliminary argument that the *synagogai* of late second-temple Palestine were local assemblies, contrary to the standard traditional belief that they were religious buildings of "Judaism," see Richard A. Horsley, *Galilee: History, Politics, People* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity, 1995), chap. 10.

16. For a provisional attempt to reconstruct the history of Galilee in Hasmonean times, see Horsley, *Galilee*, chap. 2.

Roman armies (*Jewish War* 1.180; 2.68; *Antiquities* 14.119–20; 17.288–89). And under the efficient tax collection of Antipas's newly built capitals directly in Galilee during the lifetime of Mary Magdalene and other figures in Mark's story, the heightened economic pressures on subsistence households would surely have had disintegrative effects on families (noted above in connection with the Jerusalem scribes' demand for *korban*). Interestingly enough, later in the story, Jesus condemns the scribes for "devouring widows' households," followed by an illustrative episode of how a widow gives away her whole subsistence living in responding to the scribes' encouragement to give to the temple. Not surprisingly, therefore, as discerned some time ago by Schüssler Fiorenza, in the episode for which his own mother and brothers serve as foils, Jesus calls for the whole village to form a "familial" community, in which the patriarch is conspicuously missing among mother, brothers, and sisters, to pick up the supportive functions that would ordinarily have been filled by the family.²⁰ Along with reempowering the people through healings and exorcisms, Jesus' "kingdom of God" program focuses on renewal of Mosaic covenant community, featuring the covenantal marriage bond centering the fundamental social economic unit of the family, "becoming like a child" in humble cooperation as community member, observance of nonexploitative covenantal economic relations, and commitment to egalitarian political relations, including leadership (Mark 10:1–45). Although not explicit in the episode that calls for leadership as service, it seems clear that the implicit paradigm of leadership is the service role of women in the patriarchal family, now being held up against the male disciples who represent the imperial model of exploitative power and privilege. Ironically, of course, in "malestream" interpretation ecclesial as well as secular kyriarchs have turned Mark's model of leadership, originally held up against would-be kyriarchs, against women as a scriptural warrant for subordination and servile roles.

As the political counterpart of the social revolution of renewing village-based society in covenantal community, Jesus both (literally) demonstrates and pronounces prophetic condemnation of the temple and the high priestly regime, the face of indirect rule that the Roman imperial forces present to the Palestinian Israelite people(s) (Judeans and Galileans). A woman then steps into the prophetic role of anointing Jesus, and some of the many women who had been with Jesus throughout the campaign of renewal in Galilee witness not only the crucifixion but the empty tomb as well — after Peter and the Twelve had betrayed, denied, and abandoned Jesus and, perhaps by the time Mark was being performed, had set themselves up as head honchos of a wider movement, based now in Jerusalem (as in Acts 1–15).

It would be anachronistic to claim Mark's Jesus as a hero of a utopian egalitarian social order. Mark's story rather represents a people's movement

20. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 140–51, esp. 147.

in Galilee and beyond in which gender relations are inseparable in operation from political-economic power relations and in which wo/men engage in struggle against oppressive structures and practices in the conditions in which they find themselves. In such circumstances of the disintegration of traditional patriarchal social forms such as the family and village, women commonly take leading roles, in contrast to what may happen among aristocratic or bourgeois classes.²¹ In village communities, where families live in tiny two-room facilities opening off common courtyards, there is far less separation between public and private space and roles than in the ancient urban aristocracy (e.g., of first-century Jerusalem), where wealthy families build private mansions, or in modern middle-class civil society. Even what minimal separation there is, however, breaks down in colonial or imperial situations, as the family becomes both the location and the symbol of public anti-imperial activity.²² Since the basic social forms in which the people were constituted in ancient Galilee and surrounding areas were the family and the village community, the form that renewal of the people and resistance to oppression by the Romans and their client rulers took was revival and strengthening of families and village communities. That required mutual social-economic cooperation and support, the emergence of local leadership, including those women in Galilee, and occasionally some aggressive innovation, as in the case of the Syrophenician woman.

The Diversity and Deployment of Syncretism

When we move to the Jesus movements' mission beyond Palestine in cities such as Antioch, Philippi, Corinth, and Ephesus, the interrelations between gender, class, and ethnicity become more complex, while the sources for particular groups become more fragmentary. It is again necessary to challenge and deconstruct the dominant discourse, particularly the essentialist construct of Hellenism or Hellenistic syncretism into which the remarkable cultural diversity and local histories of the eastern Roman Empire have been submerged and homogenized. And again it is impossible to separate and extricate power relations of gender from those of class and ethnicity. In this regard recent discussion of postcolonial identity in terms of hybridity, and especially critical qualifications of the concept,²³ may be useful for

21. In Israelite biblical tradition, the Song of Deborah (Judg 5) provides a dramatic illustration. See also Tamis Hoover Renteria, "The Elijah/Elisha Stories: A Socio-cultural Analysis of Prophets and People in Ninth-Century B.C.E. Israel," in *Elijah and Elisha in Socio-Literary Perspective* (ed. Robert B. Coote; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 75–126.

22. Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 217.

23. E.g., Homi K. Bhabha, "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche, and the Colonial Condition," in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory* (ed. P. Williams and L. Chrisman; New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 112–23; Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 173–83; Benita Parry, "Signs of Our Times: Discussion of Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*," *Third Text* 28–29 (1994): 5–24.

New Testament studies, both in cutting through the essentializing construct of Hellenistic syncretism and in opening historical inquiry to the varying circumstances of the peoples who participated in the expanding Jesus movements in various cities.

Prominent postcolonial theorists celebrate the hybridity of culture and identity, partly as acceptance of the impossibility of reverting to the pre-colonial past. The celebration of hybridity, however, has come in for a good deal of criticism from those concerned with historical continuity and political resistance. The concept fails to distinguish the different ways in which colonial power affected peoples in different contexts according to various factors such as class, gender, and race: "forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political cooptation, social conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence."²⁴ Without critical attention to neoinperial power relations, affirmation of hybridity runs the risk of "sanctifying the fait accompli of colonial violence."²⁵ Hybridity appears as a postmodernist "carnavalesque collapse and play of identities," possible mainly for "the migrant intellectual" who "thus dispenses with a sense of place, of belonging, of some stable commitment to one's class or gender or nation."²⁶ The idea "that one is free to invent oneself . . . as one goes along, is usually an illusion induced by availability of surpluses, of money capital or cultural capital or both."²⁷

This last point calls attention to the way in which cultural contents are today torn from their original social and historical contexts and transformed into commodities, from which multicultural consumers can piece together their hybrid identities — or acquire one after another with each passing fad or fancy. It does not take much political-economic analysis to realize that the force behind all the hyperavailable cultural diversity is global capital, which has recently begun to cannibalize culture to satisfy its insatiable appetite for profits. One of the principal motive forces of the recent rise of multiculturalism is the need of transnational corporations to deal with their own multicultural work force. But those multinational corporations also now thrive on multiculturalism, both in the contents of what it markets and in the marketing of those contents: "Hybridity and in-betweenness . . . facilitate

24. Ella Shohat, "Notes on the 'Post-colonial,'" *Social Text* 31–32 (1993): 109–10; Loomib, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 15.

25. Shohat, "Notes on the 'Post-colonial,'" 109.

26. Aijaz Ahmad, "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality," *Race and Class* 36 (1995): 13–14. Homi Bhabha, the principal postcolonial advocate of "hybridity," asserts: "I want to take my stand on the shifting margins of cultural displacement — that confounds any profound or 'authentic' sense of a 'national' culture or 'organic' intellectual"; *The Location of Culture* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), 21. A significantly different conception was operative in the convening of an international conference in biblical studies; see the papers published in *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, 2 vols.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

27. Ahmad, "Politics of Literary Postcoloniality," 18.

the transnational operations of global corporations. . . . By itself, multiculturalism and an affirmation of hybridity do not point to a way out of existing structures of power, only to modifications within it."²⁸

Questions of multiculturalism and hybridity therefore must be asked critically in relation to imperial power relations: Who, with what power, is mobilizing what cultural contents or identities or representations with what vision or goal or for what purpose or effect? Some people threatened with virtual annihilation may feel compelled, for their very survival, to assert a nearly lost cultural heritage in relatively essentialist form. To revive and reformulate precolonial languages and cultures may be some peoples' only way of not simply yielding to the effects of colonial violence.²⁹ Maintaining or recovering historical vision may be crucial in this regard. Multiculturalism could be substituted for multiculturalism. That would enable already hybridized people (most of us) to draw upon different historical trajectories out of different pasts, providing outside viewpoints from which to evaluate contemporary power relations and the ideologies that authorize them. Indeed, it might even be possible to recover histories that have been suppressed by European colonialism and the neoimperialism of global capital as a way of envisioning a future in terms of alternative historical trajectories.³⁰

In broadly analogical terms, these criticisms of postcolonial celebration of hybridity can be applied to Hellenistic syncretism in New Testament studies. Like hybridity, *syncretism* is conceived as having been largely a cultural phenomenon. Acknowledged perhaps, but usually left unexamined, is the often violent application of imperial power that pried cultural contents loose from the indigenous peoples who originally produced them — and whose collective life they provided with coherence and meaning — and/or removed people themselves from their ancestral lands and communities. The unabashed Orientalism that dominated the "history of religions" as well as the New Testament field is evident in one of the basic required textbooks in graduate training.³¹ The "East," in its "political apathy and cultural stagnation" prior to its takeover by Alexander the Great, had sunk into a state of "passivity, docility, and readiness for assimilation." Yet Eastern cultural contents could be salvaged, for "Greece had invented the *logos* . . . [and] made it available to the East, whose self-expression could now benefit from it." Salvageable cultural contents could now be "disengaged from their native soil, abstracted into the transmissible form of teachings." Thus "the first cosmopolitan civilization known to history . . . was made possible by catastrophes overtaking the original units of regional culture."

28. Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1997), 9, 17.

29. Shohat, "Notes on the 'Post-colonial,'" 109–10.

30. Dirlik, *Postcolonial Aura*, 18–19.

31. Has Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1958). The following excerpts are from 11, 13–14, 15–17, 21–22.

A more critical approach would lead us to inquire after the dislocations of people and culture by Hellenistic and Roman imperial power, which led to Hellenistic syncretism. Then questions of the creative use of syncretism (and ancient multiculturalism) must be asked critically in relation to Roman imperial power relations: Who, with what power, is mobilizing what cultural contents or identities or representations with what vision or goal or for what purpose or effect? The wealthy and powerful elite of the Greek cities, with the cooperation of the early emperors, developed the emperor cult (with statues, temples, shrines, games, etc.) on the basis of the traditional civil religion of their *poleis* into one of the dominant ways that imperial power was constituted.³² Recent investigation into the official establishment of the cult of the Magna Mater in a central civil location in Rome invites further critical analysis of the political uses of religious syncretism.³³ The Roman elite's eager devotion to the exotic Egyptian goddess Isis and initiation into her mysteries (portrayed in Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* 11) appear to be a cooptation and "commodification" of subjugated indigenous people's culture/religion for the spiritual enjoyment of the imperial elite (reminiscent of New Age phenomenon among contemporary Western elites).³⁴ On the other hand, syncretism could be used by subjected peoples in resistance to the dominant Roman imperial order. This would appear to be what the mission of some of the movements focused on Jesus did in various ways. We can focus on a few "Hellenistic Jewish" leaders in the mission of the Jesus movement that we have at least minimal information for: such as Prisca of Rome, Saul of Tarsus, and Apollos of Alexandria, marshalling available information to help illuminate their circumstances and creative actions.

Diaspora Jews Leading an Anti-imperial Movement Based in History of Israel

Roman political violence and Hellenistic-Roman cultural pressure affected peoples in different situations in different ways. Roman enslavement of tens of thousands of Syrians, Galileans, and Judeans in vengeful conquests and reconquests left them in a situation of "natal alienation."³⁵ The tiny minority who survived the brutality of slavery to become emancipated were left deracinated and socially and economically dependent on their former masters. It is likely that some Diaspora Jews who joined communities of Jesus believers were enslaved Judeans and Galileans or their descendants.

32. Simon R. E. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

33. Lynn E. Roller, *In Search of God the Mother: The Cult of Anatolian Cybele* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), chap. 10.

34. Explored in Horsley, "Religion and Other Products of Empire."

35. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

Perhaps at the opposite end of the spectrum of imperial power relations from such forced assimilation was the defensive posture of cultural mimicry evident in the treatises of Philo of Alexandria. He and other Jewish social and intellectual elite in Alexandria came to understand the true message of the Jewish Scriptures in Greek in terms of a mystical devotion to heavenly Sophia/Logos, which afforded the enlightened soul immortality and a spiritually aristocratic status as truly noble, wealthy, and powerful. Luke's and Paul's characterization (in Acts 18 and 1 Cor 1-4) of Apollos, who was also from Alexandria, as eloquent and well versed in Scripture suggests that he came from just such a social-cultural context.

The impact of imperial power relations must have been quite different, depending on the local circumstances. The Hellenistic hybridity of Saul of Tarsus, the Levite Barnabas from Cyprus, and Stephen and other "Hellenist" Jews from various Diaspora communities such as Cyrenaica, must have been very different from that of Philo of Alexandria. How else can we explain how readily some of those Hellenists, who had presumably settled in Jerusalem after coming on pilgrimage to the holy city, enthusiastically joined an Israelite peasant renewal movement focused on an executed Galilean prophet and led by a few Galilean country bumpkins like Peter, James, and John?

Similarly, far from imagining a homogenous Hellenistic culture consistent from place to place, we must also reckon that Hellenistic hybridity was different in the various "cities" of the Pauline mission. Corinth, destroyed by Roman armies in 146 B.C.E., had become the site of a colony of freed slaves and other "surplus populace" from Rome in 44 B.C.E. and because of its central commercial location would have been a humming cosmopolitan center of uprooted peoples and cultures. One can easily imagine the cultural pluralism and anxious individual quest for status and identity in such a cultural crossroads. On the other hand, the Roman impact on Macedonia, including two successive military colonies imposed on Philippi, would have left the "indigenous" population of the smaller provincial towns of Thessalonica and Philippi perhaps unusually receptive to a movement with anti-imperial overtones. One should hardly think in terms of a tranquil and homogenous social order and culture in either Thessalonica or Philippi.³⁶ We can now similarly investigate local hybridized cultural histories that have previously been submerged in essentialist concepts in order to ascertain the particular situations into which the Jesus movement and Pauline mission spread.

Another factor that surely affected the purpose and effect of cultural syncretisms in the Roman imperial order was how they may have been related to social formations. The Romans apparently allowed the Diaspora Jewish communities in many cities a measure of self-governance in their *synagogai*.

36. See further Abraham Smith, "Unmasking the Powers": Toward a Postcolonial Analysis of 1 Thessalonians," in *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (ed. Richard Horsley; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, forthcoming).

(assemblies). Such ethnic communities would have acted as important mediators of the impact of cultural hybridity and social power relations. Jewish ethnic communities would have provided some shielding and protection of ethnic culture and social relations for w/men, in contrast to the situation of either Jewish female or male slaves, to whom the Roman imperial order allowed their masters sexual access, or even compared with the rootless urban poor who belonged to no such supportive community. Diaspora Jewish synagogues may well have provided enslaved Judeans and Jewish freedpersons a supporting community that mitigated the worst effects of their natal alienation and deracination as slaves. Again, we cannot but help wonder about Prisca's background in this connection.

Many of those communities appear to have spoken Greek and to have cultivated their cultural tradition in Greek, using the Septuagint. We should not imagine, however, that all Greek-speaking Diaspora Jews cultivated the same philosophically informed allegorical interpretation as did the Alexandrian Jewish elite such as Philo. Some "Hellenistic" Jews apparently still thought in terms closer to the historical orientation evident in Psalm of Solomon 2 or even in "apocalyptic" terms, as in some of the *Sibylline Oracles*. It is entirely possible, as in modern imperial relations, that some subordinate peoples were using the imperial master's cultural "toolbox" (language, rhetorical forms, etc.) to subvert the empire and imperial power relations. And/or their cultural hybridity might be a veneer of language, idioms, and rhetorical forms that only superficially decorate an orientation deeply rooted in an imperially subordinated cultural tradition.

Just as strong opponents of Western and/or global imperialism today reject hybridity as a cultural response/strategy, so opponents of Roman imperialism rejected Hellenistic syncretism and other forms of Romanization. The Jesus movement(s) strongly reasserted Israelite traditions in a bid to renew Palestinian peoples over against Roman imperial and Roman client rulers. Even Diaspora Jews who in various ways and degrees had become acculturated to Roman-Hellenistic society, such as the "Hellenists" Stephen and Barnabas who joined the Jesus movement early on, opted to identify with and reassert what might to others have seemed an irretrievable past.³⁷ Indeed, even before they joined the Jesus movement, Hellenists such as Saul had been involved in a movement of Jewish cultural revival poised sharply over against Hellenism.

This must be what Paul is referring to when he writes about "my earlier life in *ioudaismos*," in which he was "advanced . . . beyond many among my people of the same age, . . . zealous for the traditions of my ancestors" (Gal 1:13–14). *Ioudaismos*, which has long been misunderstood in modern

religious terms as "Judaism," would appear to have been a program of renewal of what its proponents understood as the traditional Jewish/Israelite way of life in direct opposition to *hellenismos*, the cultural program that had long been forced upon the Jews, first by Seleucid and then by Roman imperial power. It is perhaps somewhat ironic for standard New Testament studies' understanding of Paul and his mission as the "Hellenization" of the Jesus movement to realize that leaders such as Paul, Barnabas, and Stephen were almost certainly acculturated Diaspora Jews who had begun to identify with more traditional Palestinian Israelite culture in direct opposition to the Roman imperial order. They were evidently rejecting their previous Hellenistic hybridity.

We can ask about Paul and other leaders of early Jesus movements the question that their critics pose to advocates of postcolonial hybridity:³⁸ Who is mobilizing what in the articulation of the past and deploying what identities in the name of what vision and goals? Paul and apparently other Diaspora Jews such as Prisca and Stephen who led the movement focused on Jesus Christ as Lord, however acculturated they were in the hybridity of Hellenistic culture, mobilized Israelite tradition for a movement whose identity was rooted in Israelite history and sharply opposed to the Roman imperial order and its syncretistic Hellenistic culture. They spearheaded a recovery of Israelite history that was in the process of being suppressed in the multicultural melting pot of Hellenistic hybridity, the culture of the Roman imperial order in the eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, their efforts helped to open a way to thinking about the future in terms of an alternative historical trajectory to the pax Romana that was oppressive for subject peoples, slaves, and the vast urban underclasses even as it provided "peace and security" for the pro-Roman urban elites. Perhaps it could be said that Paul and others were exploring a new possibility of cultural identity, understood as a project that constituted a key aspect of the struggle for liberation that it informed.³⁹

The shift in identity that Saul made to Paul (via his *apokalypsis* of Jesus Christ/commissioning by God; Gal 1:12–16) was a move from a defensive program to shore up a subject culture being threatened with submergence to an offensive use of cultural hybridity and plurality (i.e., multiculturalism) in organizing an alternative society where identity was no longer primarily ethnic/religious/separate cultural tradition, but ancillary to the project of establishing an alternative social order. For Stephen and Peter as well as for Paul, the project was based in a history different from and alternative to Rome's, that of the now subjected people of Israel. But Paul then understood that history as having opened onto a new phase of fulfillment on an international basis, among other subject peoples, in which no particular culture

37. This observation holds even if we view Stephen as a representative figure in whose mouth Luke placed a "speech in character," on the Greek and Hellenistic historiographical pattern of what a given figure would likely have said in a certain situation.

38. Shohat, "Notes on the 'Post-colonial,'" 109.

39. Dirlik, *Postcolonial Aura*, 15.

(boundary definition) was definitive, in which participation was not conditional on adherence to a particular cultural boundary definition. Other Diaspora Jews such as Prisca evidently agreed with and shared in the leadership of this program, whereas Barnabas and others did not make the same move.⁴⁰ The movement's group identity, no longer primarily cultural, was a political-economic-social-cultural project-in-progress symbolized by the formula pronounced in the baptismal ritual of incorporation: "No longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male and female."

In the letters that Paul wrote to communities he (along with Prisca and others) helped to catalyze, we have at least fragmentary indications of how he attempted to shape the project-in-progress on these three interrelated issues. Again, with feminist and postcolonial critics, it is important to get out from under the standard Western imperial discourse and master narrative of the established field that touts Paul as the very paradigm of enlightened liberal universalist Christian theologian, on the one hand, and of a sober social conservative, on the other. The former construction is based heavily on a standard (mis)reading of Paul's argument about eating meat offered to idols in 1 Cor 8–10. The latter is based mainly on deuterio-Pauline letters, which in turn influence a standard (mis)reading of one mistranslated statement about slavery in 1 Cor 7:21 and the standard reading of the letter to Philemon.

Western Christian interpreters, of course, are eager to claim Paul for their own enlightened point of view. They thus find in these paragraphs an enlightened Paul who, having himself seen through the parochialism of the Jewish legalistic scruples about idols and meat offered to them, urges other enlightened believers to refrain from eating in consideration of their weaker fellow believers' scruples, in a generous gesture toward less enlightened points of view. Paul's argument in 1 Cor 8–10, however, especially when read in the context of his overall argument in the letter, clearly goes the other direction.⁴¹ He comes to his main point in the paragraph constituted by 10:14–22 (and not in 10:23–30). He adamantly insists on the traditional Jewish/Israelite strictures against idols as representative of other gods and lords — and imposes them on non-Israelite Corinthians who have joined the assembly in Corinth — against the tolerant hybridity of enlightenment Hellenistic philosophy and Hellenistic Jewish enlightenment theology. Those other gods are not only real but dangerous. The jealous God of Israel demands the believer's exclusive loyalty. And this is a social-political matter, not simply an issue of theological belief. The Corinthians owe exclusive loyalty to Christ as their Lord: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord

40. Although in very different historical circumstances, Paul's and others' projects bear a striking similarity to the formation of Islam, which built on Arabic tradition/culture, but aimed to transcend and unite previously conflicting tribes/peoples.

41. Sketched more fully in Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 115–51.

and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (10:21). Paul flat-out rejects the principle of enlightenment Hellenistic multicultural hybridity that "all things are lawful/permissible for me!" Paul was adamant in his letter to the Galatians that Galatians and other non-Israelite peoples not be required to join Israel (by the males undergoing circumcision) in order to receive the blessings promised to all peoples through Abraham's seed, that is, adopting as children of God, along with Israelites. But he is equally adamant in 1 Corinthians that the God of Israel demands exclusive loyalty, to the point that believers cannot possibly participate in ritual expressions of other social-political solidarities. Other peoples can share in the blessings to Abraham, but cultural hybridity must yield when it poses a threat to political solidarity.

Given the importance of slavery in the political economy of the Roman Empire as its central mode of production and in the modern Western world as a subsidiary mode of production, it was important that Western academic discourse not seriously undermine its cultural acceptance. Even after it distinguished critically between the genuine letters of Paul and the deuterio-Pauline letters that adjusted back into the dominant imperial order, the basically conservative field of New Testament studies simply perpetuated the misreading of 1 Cor 7:21 ("even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever").⁴² It also continued to read Paul's letter to Philemon as concerned with the blatant cultural stereotype of a "thieving runaway slave." The latter may not even be about a slave, much less about a fugitive slave, hence not even relevant to the issue.⁴³ And the only possible reading of 1 Cor 7:21 is as an exception to the general principle enunciated in 7:17, 20, 24: "But if you have the opportunity to gain your freedom, by all means make use of it (take the opportunity). . . . You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters!"⁴⁴ The issue of slave and free overlapped considerably with that of male and female. Particularly in urban areas such as Corinth and Ephesus, the majority of household slaves would likely have been women, whereas large gangs of male slaves were deployed in mining and latifundial agriculture. As on the issue of other gods, which involved issues of political loyalty, again on the issue of slavery, Paul appears to oppose, not support, the dominant imperial order. It is not clear whether Paul condemned slavery itself, on which the metropolitan Roman economy was based, which would be analogous to condemning capitalism, on which the modern imperial economy is based. In

42. For an reexamination of standard Pauline interpretation on this and other issues of Paul's "social conservatism," see Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994), 32–52.

43. See the important revisionist treatment of Paul's letter to Philemon by Allen Dwight Callahan, *Embassy of Onesimus: The Letter of Paul to Philemon* (New Testament in Context; Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity, 1997).

44. See further Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 100–103, 113; and idem, "Paul and Slavery: A Critical Alternative to Recent Readings," *Semeia* 83–84 (1998): 153–200.

encouraging slaves to become free if possible, however, Paul was drawing on Israelite covenantal tradition, which opposed chattel slavery and included provisions for the release or redemption of debt-slaves, in opposition to the Roman imperial order, in which subject peoples who resisted imperial domination, such as Judeans and Galileans, were enslaved.

On the issue of male and female Paul appears to have been less insistent on the ideals of the project-in-progress than on the issue of slaves and free. Indeed, in his deep-seated Israelite concern about permissive Greek cultural sexual practices, he appears to persuade women to sacrifice their newly gained gender equality with men in order to ward off the danger of potentially uncontrollable male sexual desires, as leading feminist scholars demonstrate.⁴⁵ Paul is clearly familiar with the rhetoric of equality, as in the balanced phrases of 1 Cor 7:1–16 and especially the statement of 7:4, which is remarkable for any place and time. It is all the more striking, therefore, that he uses that rhetoric in attempting to manipulate married women, who apparently wished to be free of their traditional conjugal obligations, to provide an outlet for their husbands' unrestrainable sexual desire, the specter of which he has evoked in the previous two arguments of the letter (1 Cor 5; 6:12–20). In the second half of his argument about sex and marriage, Paul abandons all pretense of egalitarian rhetoric, addressing men only (7:25–38).

In the longer run, of course, the project-in-progress was adjusted to the power relations of the Roman imperial order, as later generations of Christian leaders explicitly advocated the dominant social-economic form of the patriarchal slaveholding family. Correspondingly, those identified as "Greeks," whose predecessors had joined a movement based in the history and tradition of Israel and surely identified initially as a "Jewish" movement, came to dominate the *ekklēsia* that acted more and more like what we think of as a religion.

Texts and History

In her 1987 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza states that "an *ethics of historical reading* changes the task of interpretation from finding out 'what the text meant' to the question of what kind of readings can do justice to the text in its historical contexts."⁴⁶ The critical perspectives and scholarship of feminist scholars and postcolonial critics are making it clear that readings rooted in established Western academic fields that developed in close connection

45. Antoinette C. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

46. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (1988): 14 (emphasis original).

with Western imperialism and Orientalism cannot comprehend the multiple interrelated facets of power relations involved in ancient texts or modern imperial situations. These perspectives consistently and systematically submerge other people's histories and knowledges. As Schüssler Fiorenza herself, other feminist scholars, and postcolonial critics argue, that is not simply because those fields are patriarchal, but more comprehensively because they are kyriarchal. The conception and construction of gender relations are integrally related to the conception and construction of other power relations such as those of class and ethnicity. The problem for New Testament interpreters in particular is not just that New Testament texts and their Roman imperial contexts are kyriarchal, but that the academic field in which we have been trained is kyriarchal, Western imperial as well as patriarchal. As long as we continue to perpetuate essentialist foundational constructs such as "Christianity" and "Judaism" and project peculiar modern Western assumptions of religion as separate from political-economic life, for example, we will continue the epistemic violation that compounds the Roman imperial violence imposed on ancient wo/men of various subject peoples and their struggles of political resistance and social renewal.

Perhaps it is implicit in doing justice to texts, but Schüssler Fiorenza and other feminist and postcolonial scholars seem to be engaged in a recovery of submerged histories as well as textual interpretation. This seems all the more important in our current situation, as global capital expands its domination of cultural expression in general and cannibalizes subject peoples' culture while simply making their history "disappear." This subversive agenda of feminist and postcolonial scholarship has multiple dimensions.

Implicit in both feminist scholarship and postcolonial criticism is the subversive enterprise of driving a wedge between texts and the textual communities that claim authority over and authorization by those texts, predominantly academic fields produced during and by Western imperialism. In some cases this enterprise also involves liberating the texts from textual communities. This involves a historicizing at least of the textual communities/academic fields and often also of the texts as well. The reading of New Testament texts presented above attempts to do this. The use of the Gospel of Mark discussed above insists that it was an ancient "Third World" story and neither addressed to the ancient Roman imperial metropolis nor intended for appropriation by the modern Western imperial academic field that claimed it was addressed to Rome. The use of Paul's letters discussed above insists that they do not address *homo religiosus* as constructed by universalist Western Christian theologians who take Paul as authoritative and normative, but formative communities in an ancient anti-imperial movement among subject peoples. In both cases these texts are being used not as literature to be directly appropriated by modern Western readers, but as sources for and/or reflections of ancient histories of peoples that must be reclaimed and reconstructed because they have been submerged.

Feminist scholarship also demonstrates how, once free of essentialist models Western scholarly constructs, texts can be read in order to reconstruct the history of struggles within movements, as leaders and other participants attempt to embody an alternative to the dominant power relations. In this way leaders who were elevated to positions of authority in later canonization processes and other moves by an established imperial religion to consolidate its own authority can be put back in their place in the originary struggles. Mark's story appears to be criticizing the position of, while more or less still recognizing the historical role of, Peter and the Twelve, who had set themselves up as the authorities of a wider movement headquartered in Jerusalem. Mark presents women in the narrative in juxtaposition with the commissioned but fearful, misunderstanding, and faithless Twelve as paradigms of the renewal movement and models of its assumption of mutual responsibility and solidarity.

Especially in his more polemical letters Paul, simply assuming authority over assemblies that he claims to have founded, is attempting to counter and even suppress other views and voices with which he disagrees. In opposition to Western imperial theologians who claim Paul as the authoritative correction of alternative, "heretical" views, feminist scholars demonstrate how, with sophisticated rhetorical criticism, Paul's letters can be used as sources for the voices that Paul was trying to "correct" or submerge.⁴⁷ Paul's letters were attempts at persuasion, one side of ongoing conversations, even contentious arguments. Just as Paul was one leader among many, sometimes in sync, sometimes in conflict with one another or with the assemblies they catalyzed, so his arguments give voice to one position among many. And because he is often trying to persuade by speaking directly to other positions and even articulates his arguments in others' language, we can often discern those other voices through Paul's arguments. Equipped with rhetorical criticism, therefore, we can use Paul's letters as windows into the struggles of people with various positions and concerns, struggling with each other as they work out their project-in-progress.⁴⁸ In New Testament studies feminist scholarship thus shows the way to discern in our texts how, at more than one level, the histories of women and (other) imperial subjects are "histories of resistance and opposition and not just histories of oppression."⁴⁹

It is important generally to affirm the centrality of history, given its neglect by much contemporary cultural criticism, after the "linguistic turn" in

Western academic scholarship. The increasing consolidation of global capital's cultural as well as political hegemony on a global scale is "producing among the professional intelligentsia a characteristic loss of historical depth and perspective."⁵⁰ To reclaim submerged people's histories, suppressed by the dominant order, may be particularly important to enable us once again "to conceive of the past not merely as a route to the present, but as a source of alternative historical trajectories that had to be suppressed so that the present could become a possibility."⁵¹ The struggles of movements that attempted to counter multiple interrelated oppressive power relations, including replication of such power relations within the movements, may then be highly informative and valuable to today's alliances of groups attempting to counter multiple interrelated power relations of a new imperial order. Recovering those submerged histories will contribute toward new efforts to reimagine and pursue what Schüssler Fiorenza calls unfulfilled historical possibilities.

47. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Rhetorical Situation and Historical Reconstruction in 1 Corinthians," *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 386–403; *Wire, Corinthian Women Prophets*.

48. See further Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Paul and the Politics of Interpretation," in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 2000), 57.

49. Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 50.

50. Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London/New York: Verso, 1992), 16.

51. Dirlík, *Postcolonial Aura*, 3.