

# Paul and postcolonial hermeneutics: Marginality and/in early biblical interpretation<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The paper explores Paul's engagement with the Scriptures of Israel from the point of view of (his sense of) marginality, which invites a postcolonial perspective on his hermeneutics. It first briefly considers the deployment of postcolonial criticism in biblical studies, followed by a consideration of the value of postcolonial theory for Paul's biblical hermeneutics. Four areas where postcolonial criticism can make a contribution to the understanding how Pauline hermeneutics interacted with issues of power and authority are discussed in 2 Corinthians 10-13: the importance of acknowledging the influence of ideological concerns on Paul's hermeneutical strategy; the conceptualisation and portrayal of "others" in the hermeneutical enterprise; considering hybridity in postcolonial identity and hermeneutics; and, the interplay, confluence and (contradictory yet inherent) tension between operational marginality and hermeneutics – aspects of which are also demonstrated from the Pauline epistles. The paper is concluded with specific attention to the underlying argument that also Paul's hermeneutics was informed by the tension between centre and margins within the first-century imperial context.

## 1. Introduction: The appeal of postcolonial biblical criticism

A number of subtle presuppositions and more explicit reasons underlie the use of postcolonial criticism in New Testament studies – and in this case, the Pauline letters – and while this is not the venue to discuss such issues at length, at least one important matter deserves attention. The Pauline literature knew no other socio-political context than that of the Roman Empire,<sup>2</sup> in both its public manifestation of material power and control through its rulers, armies and conventions, but also in more subtle ways.<sup>3</sup> "Imperial power relations operated in complex ways through cultural-religious forms integrally related to social-economic forms of domination, and not simply by the sword" (Horsley 2004:3). As much as Paul's own Jewish upbringing and identity, as well as the socio-cultural context of a pervasive Hellenism are important for the interpretation of the apostle's letters, it was the imperial setting that largely informed but also determined the daily lives and minds of people across the first-century Mediterranean world.

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared for the *Paul and Scripture seminar*, at the SBL Annual Meeting, 17-20 November 2007, San Diego CA, USA. The title is deliberately ambiguous, since it is both an investigation of Paul's use of the Scriptures of Israel from a postcolonial perspective as well as the consideration of the applicability and potential usefulness of labelling Paul's hermeneutics postcolonial, which is in focus in the paper.

<sup>2</sup> Segovia (1998:57) refers to "the massive presence and might of the Roman Empire, master and lord of the entire Circum-Mediterranean, with its thoroughly accurate if enormously arrogant classification of the Mediterranean Sea as *mare nostrum*".

<sup>3</sup> Horsley (2004:11-19) provides a brief but useful catalogue of the strategies used by the Roman Empire to maintain its authority and control: disruption and displacement of subject peoples; slavery, patronage, the imperial cult; and, public rhetoric.

Postcolonial biblical criticism is eminently suitable to address the complexities emerging from both historical and discursive colonialism. Employing notions of mimicry and hybridity, for example, it is capable of providing frameworks for understanding the formation and cultivation of identities influenced by a broad ranging exercise of hegemony and control.<sup>4</sup> The potential and use of postcolonial criticism for studying biblical texts has been established over the least two decades<sup>5</sup> and in fact moved beyond the stage where it needs elaborate arguments in favour of either its rationale or value if not significance, without claiming postcolonial criticism as monolithic enterprise – although, suffice it to say that criticism of various aspects of postcolonial biblical criticism has not stayed out (cf Moore and Segovia 2005). This paper explores Paul's engagement with the Scriptures of Israel from the perspective of the interrelationship between his hermeneutics and (sense of) marginality, therefore inviting a postcolonial perspective on his hermeneutics.

The focus thus is on Paul's scriptural hermeneutics in the first century *imperial* context, but attention is required not primarily for historical but rather for discursive colonialism<sup>6</sup> – or, to be slightly more specific in claim if not more precise in denotation, discursive hegemony. On the assumption that scriptural quotation but also allusion and hinting (echo) form an integral part of Paul's reasoning and arguments,<sup>7</sup> the particular interest is with how Scripture is involved in (used in various ways), implicated in (enlisting Scripture as authoritative agent) and how it influenced (Scripture is rewritten) Paul's involvement in the discourse(s) of power. Given that Paul's, like other ancient, texts were produced "in the shadow of empire" (Segovia 1998:57), this contribution is a

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<sup>4</sup> Hegemony in postcolonial thought is *domination by consent* (Gramsci), "the active participation of a dominated group in its own subjugation", and regardless of the fact that the subjugated numerically outweighs those exercising power over them even if the oppressor or army of occupation may have the advantage in terms of instruments of subjugation such as sophisticated weaponry and the like. "In such cases...the indigene's desire for self-determination will have been replaced by a discursively inculcated notion of the greater good, couched in such terms as social stability...and economic and cultural advancement" (cf Moore 2006:101).

<sup>5</sup> Numerous publications in postcolonial biblical studies include important studies by Boer, Brett, Moore, Segovia, Sugirtharajah, and others. For a recent overview of such studies, cf the annotated bibliography in Moore (2006:124-151).

<sup>6</sup> Although historical and discursive colonialism cannot be totally divorced from each other, it is important to note the distinction between the two, particularly in the first-century context where the focus has for long been on the historical aspects related to the Roman Empire only. This has led to a reluctance to account for the complexity of the imperial context which was not merely or exclusively about Roman dominance (others collaborated and benefited, too) through military power and politico-administrative hegemonic institutions and mechanisms – though certainly about these measures as well. Similarly, the paper is not primarily addressing the question about the audience(s) of Paul's letters, and their relationship to the historical-institutional face of the Empire, whether in its central or local constructions; it deals with the fact that "[a]t no point that we can now recapture was there a 'first Christianity' distinct from its verbal expression" (Cameron 1991:32).

<sup>7</sup> Amidst differences of opinion regarding Paul's purpose in and style of using the Scriptures, among others, few scholars today would deny the pervasive role of the Scriptures and the influence of a broader scriptural framework in Paul's thought as found in his letters (e.g. Aageson 1993; Hays 1989:1-5; Wagner 2003:356-357).

preliminary investigation of the conceptual resources offered by postcolonial theory in an area where such notions have not generally been actively employed; in short, to explore the significance of a postcolonial approach for investigating Paul's use of Scripture within the first-century imperial setting.

## 2. How is a postcolonial approach *hermeneutically* helpful?

### 2.1 Roman Empire, Paul, and discourses of power<sup>8</sup>

As claimed in an earlier publication, postcolonial biblical criticism can best be described as a variety of hermeneutical approaches characterised by their political nature and ideological agenda – although it is not just ideological criticism re-inscribed – and whose textual politics ultimately concerns both a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of retrieval or restoration. It interacts with colonial history (broadly conceived, connoting imperialism and hegemony in different forms and at different levels), and its aftermath(s) which concerns both a history of repression and of repudiation, but it also deals with exposé and with restoration and transformation.<sup>9</sup> With postcolonial studies intrinsically tied to hermeneutics, it represents a shift in emphasis, a strategy of reading, in an attempt to point out what was missing in previous analyses, as well as to rewrite and correct (Punt 2003:59). Important for the argument here is that if the postcolonial condition is about more than subscribing to either of two extremes, of choosing either submission or subversion, and rather comprises “unequal measures of loathing and admiration, resentment and envy, rejection and imitation, resistance and cooption, separation and surrender” (Moore 2006:x), then those who found and find themselves engaged by postcoloniality have an intricate task of reflecting on these complexities in a clear yet nuanced way.<sup>10</sup>

Much has been written about different ways in which the Roman Empire and its politics can be understood with respect to how Paul encountered it and its effects, but for our purpose two broad issues stand out. Paul's reaction was probably not directed so

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<sup>8</sup> “Power” more in the sense of claiming and exercising authority over others though deploying material and other means, than simply as the ability to achieve goals in a social system.

<sup>9</sup> A postcolonial perspective acknowledges the complexity of cultural and political configurations and structures which form boundaries between the opposing sides of powerful and marginalised in hegemonic contexts (cf Bhabha 1994:173). When utilising a postcolonial analytical grid for NT texts, it is important not to try and claim too much, given the power imbalance between Romans and any of their subjected peoples, including the Jews in Palestine and in Diaspora.

<sup>10</sup> In the words of Segovia (1998:57): “How do the margins look at the ‘world’ – a world dominated by the reality of empire – and fashion life in such a world? How does the center regard and treat the margins in the light of its own view of the ‘world’ and life in that world? What images and representations of the other-world arise from either side? How is history conceived and constructed by both sides? How is ‘the other’ regarded and represented? What conceptions of oppression and justice are to be found?”

much to Rome as imperial centre since his interaction was primarily with local structures of the power instilled, maintained and linked to the Roman Empire – Roman Empire understood broadly as regime complete with all its materiality, institutions, customs and conventions. And secondly, Pauline opposition to the Roman Empire was not primarily at the level of narrow political rhetoric, in the sense of rather narrowly matching claims regarding the Emperor with counter-claims about Jesus Christ – and everything else that went along with both Emperor and Christ! Perceiving of Roman Empire as broader, regime-like socio-political as much as socio-cultural presence,<sup>11</sup> Paul's anti-imperial rhetoric was as much political as social and religious (cf Price 2004:183).<sup>12</sup>

Positioning Paul socio-politically of course amounts to more than presenting an appropriate portrayal of the Roman Empire in its various institutionalised, material guises throughout the territory over which it exercised control. Paul was involved in a rather broad discourse of power<sup>13</sup> ably assisted by sophisticated rhetorical skill, and informed but also made complex by broader influences besides the ever widening and usurping creep of the Roman Empire. Such influences included (without claiming to be exhaustive) also his own ethnic identity and Jewish traditions; the tensions among the followers of Christ and various other contenders and claims to the emerging Christian tradition in his time; socio-economic conditions including patronage and slavery; social status concerns including citizenship-status; the broader Greco-Roman (not to say Hellenistic) philosophical, religious and related traditions; and, not least, his personal convictions, ideals and aspirations.<sup>14</sup> While Paul's discourse of power largely

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<sup>11</sup> Moving beyond the image of emperor as consistently distant, aloof and physically secluded in the imperial court, Millar pointed with the dictum "the emperor was what the emperor did" (1977:6ff), to the emperors' involvement in giving of justice while on military campaign and circumstances allowed, often incorporating extensive communications by means of letters and decrees. And it is from these communications between the emperors and individuals and groups of people, that "the immensely complex network of relationships which bound the emperor to the educated bourgeoisie of the cities" (1977:9) emerged. For our discussion, two important implications have to be noted: this network of relationships underwrote the wide-ranging interaction between imperial court and citizens (with few exceptions, predominantly the local powerful people or elite, 1977:11), and the local citizenry's negotiations with the emperor gave credence to the understanding of hegemony as domination by consent as a fair description of the first century's imperial situation.

<sup>12</sup> Although it cannot be dealt with here, empire and the messiness of scholarly constructions thereof has in the past been the object of criticism; cf e.g. Stowers' (1998:297-302) critique against what he perceives to be Horsley's totalising schemes.

<sup>13</sup> In the sense meant by Foucault: "not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his continuity with himself [sic] may be determined" (Foucault 1972:55). However, to refer to Paul's discourse of power as an "ideological intifada" (Elliott 1994:184), as found particularly in the letter to Romans (esp Rom 12:2), may be too strong. Such a description tends to obscure (elements of) Paul's participation in a rhetoric of power, especially when one recognises how ideological posturing cannot be conceived apart from its influence and affects on its adversaries also.

<sup>14</sup> The point here is not to describe the nature of Paul's rhetoric, but to note that it was characterised – when comparing it to other, contemporary discourses – by the same tendencies of inclusivity and multiplicity or elasticity as found in the prevailing and later early Christian discourses (cf Cameron 1991:7-9).

originated in his claims to apostleship<sup>15</sup> and the authority he derived from his experience of God's revelation to him (e.g. Gal 1:1, 16; cf. Polaski 1999:24-28, 43), another important element which contributed to but which was simultaneously also constituted by Paul's discourse of power, was evidently his use of biblical traditions.

## ***2.2 Paul's discourse of power, and the role of Scripture***

Over the last few decades renewed and enthusiastic interest has led to considerable growth in studying the reception of the Old Testament in the New Testament,<sup>16</sup> and perhaps even more importantly, has increasingly not only allowed but also invited forays in this area of academic research that went beyond earlier source-critical studies, and other historical critical approaches,<sup>17</sup> as well as research on the relation between the quotation and the source texts. An important area for further research is to investigate the extent of early hermeneutics' involvement in the powerful and totalising discourse that developed and was nurtured in early Christianity,<sup>18</sup> given the particularly powerful role attributed to language<sup>19</sup> in general but also spoken, written and other (e.g. visual) forms of rhetoric<sup>20</sup> as that which indicates the approach and conditions that advance persuasion. Early Christianity soon followed carefully in footsteps of the Roman Empire regarding the development of an all-encompassing rhetorical (or propaganda) strategy, a rhetoric of Empire (cf. Cameron 1991: esp. 20).

<sup>15</sup> Stanley (1994:36) notes that Paul's explicit quotations of the Scriptures occurred only in his letters where the defence of his apostolic ministry and apostleship was on the cards. While the apologetic objective can be discerned in 1 and 2 Cor and Gal, the explanation of the quotations in Rom as "attempts to establish a favourable balance of power with the Roman Christians prior to his impending visit" (Stanley 1994:36 n61), is not compelling.

<sup>16</sup> Both terms, "Old Testament" and "New Testament", are contested, in biblical studies generally but in particular in "OT in NT"-studies. I prefer to use Scriptures of Israel (or just the Scriptures) and biblical traditions. To use "Hebrew Bible" in this context does not do justice to either its few Aramaic chapters nor to the indications that Paul used the LXX in any way. The term "Jewish Scriptures" tends to bestow an ethnic or at least national identity on these documents which they might have acquired in Paul's day but did not always have during the earlier periods of their development and transmission.

<sup>17</sup> Including earlier studies on source texts (e.g. Müller 1989, 1993), and method and technique in Pauline citations (cf. Stanley 1992). While such interests are not the focus of this study, my essay admits to the hermeneutical variety and diversity in Paul's use of the Scriptures, and is of course not arguing that he always used the same techniques for appropriating the Scriptures (e.g. Midrash *and* allegory in Galatians), or used them (by citation, allusion or echo) to achieve the same purpose (e.g. Paul reinterpreted Abraham's story in Gal 4:21-5:1 *and* used it to bolster his argument in Gal 3).

<sup>18</sup> This claim extends recent appeals for research into the rhetorical impact of Paul's quotations, for investigating the influence and ultimately effectiveness of such quotations for the lives of the original audiences (cf. Stanley 2004), by both teasing out the involvement of quotations in Pauline discourse and in considering the effect of Paul's quotations on his rhetoric and his rhetorical identity.

<sup>19</sup> Underlined by the notion that "the Christian God is modelled on language" (Harpham, in Cameron 1991:6).

<sup>20</sup> The investigation of Christian discourse in the 1<sup>st</sup> century imperial context involves attention for both sides of this "two-way process", since Christian discourse also made an impact on the society which influenced it (Cameron 1991:4). While the inherent reciprocity is acknowledged, the focus here is on the relation between the imperial setting and Paul's hermeneutics (in particular, and his discourse of power, more generally). The possible reciprocal feedback of Paul's discourse on his audiences is not specifically addressed, although implied – even if only regarding the implicit readers or audience.

As mentioned earlier, until now postcolonial theory has not become a widespread heuristic device for explaining early biblical hermeneutics, or Pauline hermeneutics in particular – and the attempt here is only a first step. It is however, a particularly pertinent need since it is with Paul that the pattern that Christianity would be a matter of articulation and interpretation is established.<sup>21</sup> Paul contributed to the formation of early Christianity as not in the first instance characterised by ritual or even ethical behaviour, but centrally and crucially about teaching, interpretation and definition: “As Christ ‘was’ the Word, so Christianity *was* its discourse or discourses” (Cameron 1991:32). In Paul’s discourse of power, and without discounting his essentially oral-based context, a new reality was constructed through his use texts, as Paul and his fellow followers of Christ constructed a new world, an alternative reality built upon the framework of Judaism and in interaction with the material context of the Roman Empire in which they lived and wherein they experienced various forms of Greek philosophy, pagan practice, and contemporary social ideas at first hand level<sup>22</sup> (Cameron 1991:11-12, 21).

Already in his use of writing as “long-distance communication”, Paul’s actions engaged the imperial context, since writing was essential for the establishment and maintenance of the Roman Empire. In the predominantly illiterate first-century world, “writing was both an instrument of power and a symbol of power” (Dewey 1994:44; cf Stroumsa 2003:163). The privilege and power attached to writing was based on the importance of literacy in a context where the ability to use language, and also written language, went along with leadership (Gamble 1995:9-10). Without claiming that it necessarily came about by choice rather than by default given the geographical and logistical challenges of the day, Paul’s written or textual strategy shows his ambivalent position. Paul’s writings meant that he simultaneously engaged the powers of the day (at least by measuring up to Empire through establishing a counter-discourse, also textually inscribed) but also that he exercised and increasingly formulated his own discourse of power. And particularly important here, Paul went one step further and

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<sup>21</sup> “Its subsequent history was as much about words and their interpretation as it was about belief or practice” although the two can never be thoroughly separated as is illustrated by how the ecumenical Council of Nicea (325 CE) eventually turned on one letter in a word (Cameron 1991:12, 21). The focus on interpretation and translation, as well as the use of a codex beyond the cultic setting, are not only called “revolutionary” but also accorded an important role in the missionary success of Christianity in the later Roman Empire by Stroumsa (2003:159-171).

<sup>22</sup> The textual construction of a new world was accomplished by social practice or lifestyle and through control and discipline (Cameron 1991:21), both aspects which can already be discerned in Paul and his hermeneutics in particular. Cf also Stroumsa (2003:153-173, esp 156ff) on the early Christians’ use of the Septuagint as canon of authoritative texts which was central to their (sense of) identity.

invoked directly and indirectly the Scriptures of Israel as authoritative source. It can thus be claimed that “Paul’s critique of Caesar’s empire was firmly grounded in his Jewish heritage” (Wright 2000:181).

It was through a specific form of oral-literacy<sup>23</sup> namely Paul’s use of the Scriptures as sanctioning or authorising agent in a discourse of power that he could both challenge and critique imperial discourse but also by means of which his position and authority as leader was underwritten.<sup>24</sup> Since words were powerful and holy words even more so in the first century, Paul’s use of texts for the purpose of authenticating arguments in a world of orality was not exceptional (cf Stroumsa 2003:163). In his arguments, Scripture was often for Paul his starting point as well as criterion,<sup>25</sup> and in polemical contexts, he used Scripture as final court of appeal since it was for him sacred, proceeding from God and thus having ultimate authority (Silva 1993:638-639; cf Stockhausen 1990:196-197).<sup>26</sup> Paul’s invocation of the Scriptures of Israel as authority against Roman imperialist discourse pertained to the Scriptures’ content as well as its structural authority with legitimate history and, therefore, claims. In short, Paul’s literacy established his authority, which he, reciprocally, maintained through the exercise of his literacy capabilities, and in this dynamic interrelationship, the Scriptures played a central role in providing building blocks for an alternative reality-construction and in sanctioning or authorising the Pauline discourse.

### ***2.3 Paul, hermeneutics and marginality***

Again, investigating Pauline hermeneutics in a context of imperial rhetoric invites a postcolonial perspective, with its particular foci, to raise different questions, highlight aspects of and tensions in texts which other approaches and methodologies might not focus on. Since postcolonial biblical criticism is hardly a methodology but rather an

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<sup>23</sup> With 1<sup>st</sup> century religious propaganda being oral in character (cf Georgi 1986), Stroumsa refers to the literacy developments among early Christianity as revolutionary, adding that this literacy was nevertheless oral in form (Stroumsa 2003:162), as evident in Paul’s letters.

<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to note that Thiselton (pursuing the ideas of Moores) attributes Paul’s use of argument to his appeals to the Scriptures of Israel and reason (Thiselton 2000:15-16).

<sup>25</sup> The privileged role of the “inspired interpreter” often exceeded the fixed wording of texts in ancient hermeneutics. “[E]xegetical elasticity matches the textual elasticity of the Qumran Bible. It still requires an explanation. I believe this should be sought in the paramount doctrinal authority of ‘the Priests, the sons of Zadok, the guardians of the Covenant’” (Vermes 2005:67). Vermes also stresses the importance of a fixed canon and final texts in communities which base their existence on the texts and their interpretation; however, “if ‘orthodoxy’ depends on privileged priestly teaching, the particular wording of the Bible seems to be less important” (Vermes 2005:67 n18).

<sup>26</sup> Silva disagrees with Von Harnack who held that Paul merely invoked Scripture as a “tool” in polemic with his Judaizing opponents. Paul also invoked Scripture on the issues where he differed from tradition, e.g. Gal 3 on the law which, Paul wants to argue, does not give life as the OT states. For another interpretation, cf Scott (1993:187-221).

approach, embodying a range of intellectual, critically theoretical, ideological and other stances, positions, and approaches, it offers the opportunity to reread the re-readings or interpretations found in the New Testament. A first acknowledgement in this regard is that Paul, like other early Christians, found himself in a marginalised position, members of a *religio illicita* and typically outsiders to the broader political scenario, for religious and other reasons, but increasingly also to religious establishments, Jewish<sup>27</sup> and otherwise. The second, important point is that notwithstanding that it was perhaps partly dictated by his marginal position, Paul's rhetoric of power at times came close to the rhetoric of empire he engaged and deflected.<sup>28</sup> This basic ambivalence<sup>29</sup> where the apostle along with the majority of others suffered marginalisation but where he also vied for power, is extended through participation in a colonial/imperial context where the subalterns challenge each other for the favour of the powerful but also to establish their (the subalterns') power and influence, regardless of how little or insignificant it might seem in comparison to the might of imperial hegemony.

Realising that the relationship between hermeneutics and marginality need much more attention, this contribution's focus is restricted to the twofold nature of marginality. Marginality is a concept of degree and not absolutes (Perlman in Roetzel 2003:8), and therefore has to be understood within the contexts it is taken from as description, and within the relationships deemed to have given birth to it.<sup>30</sup> On the one hand, marginality can be enforced by oppressive forces from outside, but on the other hand, marginality can also be taken up, claimed and become a place of "radical openness and possibility" (bell hooks). Tremendous power is exercised by the powerful in assigning marginality and this creates alienation, estrangement and marginalisation, serving the interests of the powerful who establish themselves at and as the centre. However, the powerless who now find themselves at the periphery, marginalised or even in a

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<sup>27</sup> While not explicitly purporting to pursue a postcolonial approach, some scholars have recently shown themselves alert to the ambiguity of Paul's position as a marginal Jew (e.g. Roetzel 2003; Boyarin 1994). This is not to discount Boyarin's strong claims that Paul's allegorised Jewish distinctiveness and therefore Jewish identity away!

<sup>28</sup> Cameron makes a similar point regarding early Christians, compared to the likes of Nero, Pliny, Tacitus, and Suetonius, but stressing how the Christians' use of language, in writing and otherwise, increasingly approximated the rhetoric of empire, which, in her opinion, is the first steps of Christianity's road to a world religion (Cameron 1991:14).

<sup>29</sup> Notwithstanding disagreements with elements of Roetzel's claim, he realises Paul's ambivalence in hermeneutics: "So while Paul's scriptural interpretation found a simplification when refracted through the lens of his apocalyptic myth, his hermeneutic was complicated by inclusive tendencies set loose by his gospel" (Roetzel 2003:36).

<sup>30</sup> Marginality is invoked for different purposes: by the powerful in furthering their own interests and suppressing the voices and longings of others; or to preserve the status quo and fend off political, cultural, religious or other challenges to the politically, economically or in whatever other way powerful group; or simply to discredit alternative ideological positions as wrong or evil. In short, marginality can be used to prop up personal beliefs and social interests in the face of criticism or theoretical challenges (cf. Roetzel 2003:8).

liminal<sup>31</sup> state, can utilise their marginality as an opportunity for radical possibility – what is considered as given, as reality can be re-imagined, and a new reality can be envisaged, construed and lived (Roetzel 2003:2).

Focussing on the liminality of Paul's position and how it pertains to his engagement with the Scriptures of Israel, it is possible for instance to reflect on the ambivalence displayed in his stance which confirmed these traditions yet reinterpreted, challenged, and at times subverted them. The Scriptures were the signifying practices for Paul's faith and theological understanding, at once the fount of wisdom and knowledge for the future yet also fulfilled in Christ. And at a meta-level, Paul's use of the Scriptures of Israel implied that his whole project was linked to a marginal group in the first century, but it was at the same time his explicit and subtle appeals to the Scriptures that became the basis of his authority and through whose reality-contributing construction a new discourse of power was formatted and formulated. An interesting instance of these interrelationships between hermeneutics, power and marginality can be found in the last part of 2 Corinthians.

### **3. Paul and postcolonial hermeneutics: 2 Corinthians 10-13**

In addition to the above, one further and particularly important aspect of the perception-shifting work on the Roman Empire,<sup>32</sup> needs to be emphasised since it impacts on Paul's hermeneutical strategy towards the Scriptures of Israel in particular. It can no longer be maintained that the Empire was either monolithic or that it was merely imposed in a rather top-down way on its passive and interest-less would-be subjects. To the contrary, that what was called *the Empire* was essentially the distillation of sustained interaction between rulers and subjects. Without claiming that military might – and exercising it – was inconsequential, or that oppression and subjection were unfair words to use with reference to the imperial powerful of the first century CE, empire was made possible through a series of ongoing choices and negotiations between subjects and rulers, and that amidst the powerful, political

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<sup>31</sup> Liminality is linked to transition, related to a situation (or even position) of transition – and therefore deals with the in-between-ness of the transitory, neither here nor there, on the threshold but thus also destabilised, without power, not belonging.

<sup>32</sup> It may be a common-place to assert that religion never excluded politics in the Roman Empire (e.g. Segal 2000:189), but it is worrying that little effort is made with the political element or with using tools which are capable of identifying, exposing and investigating the political dimensions of the Pauline writings, among others.

manoeuvres and overtures of the imperial mighty ones, “inferiors negotiate[d] new positions for themselves” (Price 2004:176).

At least two further and immediate implications for the argument here flow from such an adjusted understanding of the Roman Empire and its discursive imperialism or hegemony: one, Paul and the communities that Paul addressed found themselves in a hegemonic situation, which was largely characterised by consensual – in the Gramscian sense – domination.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, Paul’s role amidst these first century-communities of the followers of Christ, was an ambivalent one, and whilst it should evidently not be perceived as having been akin to that of a political commissar, it must be understood more organically, with Paul claiming and negotiating power across a broad front including political but also ethnic, economic, religious, cultural and other dimensions.

It would, therefore, be restrictive for a discussion of Paul’s identity and actions as portrayed in his letters not to account for his involvement in and interaction with the broader Hellenistic cultural and the Roman imperial or socio-political context, as well. In his engagement with the imperial context, Paul’s references and allusions to the Scriptures of Israel in his arguments contributed within his circle of influence to the subversion of, or at least challenged, the powerful and their claims. Paul’s letters evidence more than a passing concern for the Scriptures of Israel, which can in fact be shown to largely underlie his thinking and the contents of his arguments. Paul’s scripturally based and focused arguments show him deeply rooted in his Jewish context, and its prevailing traditions<sup>34</sup> (e.g. Ehrensperger 2005:234). In short, the Scriptures were enlisted through citations and broader allusions in Paul’s challenge to the imperial rhetoric of power.

These concerns and a few specific characteristic elements or topics of postcolonial analysis employed below can be traced in Paul’s Corinthian correspondence.<sup>35</sup> In

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<sup>33</sup> The evidence of uprisings and revolts in the areas where Paul claimed to have been working as apostle, is scarce and probably an instance where the exception (insurrection) proved the rule (negotiated domination).

<sup>34</sup> Without claiming that first-century Judaism was in any way monolithic, or that Paul was necessarily representative of Judaism in some sort of general sense! For a fairly extensive consideration of how more than just quoting from the scriptures, Paul “lived” in his Bible, invoking and interacting with the Psalms, the prophets (Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah), and (other) Wisdom literature (Proverbs, wisdom of Sirach and the Book of Wisdom), in this case in 2 Cor, cf Young and Ford (1987:60-84).

<sup>35</sup> At the time of Paul’s writings, the recent history of the city would still be fresh in the memories of the receivers of the letters. Corinth was sacked by Roman legions in 146 BCE under leadership of general Lucius Mummius, and was only re-established

these letters with their many interesting angles, Paul's animated defence of his ministry and apostleship in 2 Cor 10-13 also displays both his anti-imperial, marginal hermeneutics and his discourse of power.<sup>36</sup> Whereas the rhetorical pitch of the letters are often described as pastoral, aimed at ethical options against the background of a reaffirmation of the *parousia* and (future) eschatology in general,<sup>37</sup> increasing recognition is recorded for the strong subversive or anti-imperial language of these letters at surface level as well as more subtly.

First a few general remarks on 2 Cor 10-13<sup>38</sup> are in order. In 2 Cor 10-13 Paul was evidently hard-pressed to defend his apostolic status, and therefore his position as messenger as well as his message, against challenges from other, super-apostles (τῶν ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλων, 11:5; 12:11) which he also called false apostles (ψευδαπόστολοι, 11:13).<sup>39</sup> The four chapters of 2 Cor 10-13 are generally treated as a unity, and regardless of the position assumed in the debate about the letter's integrity, would fit in well with the broader Corinthian correspondence with its subversive yet authoritative tone.<sup>40</sup>

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in 44 BCE by Julius Caesar as Roman colony (Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis), a city according to a Roman rather than a Greek model, as attested by the large number (almost 1200) of inscriptions found of which the majority was "official" and often connected to dedications to the emperors. Freedmen, veteran Roman soldiers and tradesmen and labourers were settled here in the city with its huge strategic economic purpose, and they were later joined by immigrants from the East. Corinth was of strategic importance for Paul's ministry and possibilities to expand, given the location of the city and its trade connection (Thiselton 2000:2-6;17-22).

<sup>36</sup> Unlike a letter such as Romans, the Corinthian correspondence was at first glance not directed at a community in the heart of the Empire, and should therefore be a good test case for the argument about the use of the Scriptures in Paul's rhetoric of power. 2 Cor, a composite letter, may be an even less obvious choice for arguing the case of postcolonial analysis for Paul's use of Scripture, not least since it contains only six explicit quotations (4:6, 13; 6:2; 8:15; 9:9; 10:17 – and the last one might be a repetition of 1 Cor 1:31)! Even if the quotations from Lev 26:11; Ezek 37:27; Is 52:11, 4; Ezek 20:34, 41; 2 Sam 7:14; 2 Sam 7:8 in 2 Cor 6:16-18 (as part of 2 Cor 6:14-7:1) is not seen as a later interpolation (so Stanley 2004:97-98 n1; *contra* Young and Ford 1987:62), 2 Cor still has relatively few quotations when compared with Romans, 1 Cor, and Gal.

<sup>37</sup> The apocalyptic-eschatological strain as found for example in 1 Cor is not simply about reigning in the overly enthusiastic Corinthian followers of Christ; the apocalyptic tradition is essentially anti-empire (cf Rieger 2007:48-49), and in contemporary parlance anticipated "regime-change". If one follows the suggestions of Wright (2000:161-162) that Paul's high ecclesiology saw the establishment of churches as "colonial outposts of the empire that is to be" and that rather as a missionary in religious garb Paul acted as "an ambassador of a king-in-waiting" setting up and organising groups of loyal followers whose lives were based on the reality created by his story, the connection between pastoral and political is emphasised. Horsley (1997:242-252) claims that in 1 Cor Paul formulated strategies for how the Corinthians were to establish itself as "a community of a new society alternative to the dominant imperial society".

<sup>38</sup> The integrity of 2 Cor is often disputed, seeing it as a composite letter of which the following constituent parts are identified in various segregations and combinations with one another and the letter as a whole: 1:1-2:13, 7:5-16 (Paul's boasting); 2:14-7:4 (the apostolic office; from which 6:14 – 7:1 is often omitted as a later interpolation); 8-9 (Jerusalem collection); 10-13 (Paul's defence of his apostolic ministry, and seen by some to have been, if only partially, the "tearful" letter of 2 Cor 2:3-4, 7:8). Cf e.g. Bultmann (1985:16-18); other scholars argue for the literary integrity of 2 Cor, e.g. Harris (2005:8-51).

<sup>39</sup> Some scholars argue that these were two different groups, with the first being a sarcastic and derogatory reference to the Twelve or the original apostles, and the second indicating (self-appointed?) envoys from the Jerusalem church (cf Harris 2005:74).

<sup>40</sup> Early in 1 Cor Paul already challenged the conventions of the time, contrasting general perceptions about wisdom and folly with God's (1 Cor 1:18-31), and specifying "the rulers of this age" (τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦτου, 1 Cor 2:6) in particular, and in fact claiming that they (both conventional wisdom and current rulers) "are passing away" (τῶν καταργουμένων, 1 Cor 2:6) – in 1 Cor 1:19 Paul underlined his claim with a quote from Is 29:14.

Secondly, Paul's reasoning is embedded in Jewish scriptural tradition,<sup>41</sup> and requires an attempt to understand Pauline hermeneutics as beyond and encompassing more than direct quotes. Interestingly, 2 Cor 10-13 is framed by two direct quotes, with Jer 9:22-23 (2 Cor 10:17)<sup>42</sup> supporting the claim to boast in the Lord, and Dt 19:15 (2 Cor 13:1) on the requisite number of witnesses for sustaining a claim.<sup>43</sup> Various other allusions strengthen the scriptural setting of Paul's argument, already with the appeal to "meekness and gentleness/fairness" (πραΰτης and ἐπιείκεια) both of which were also used with reference to God (e.g. LXX Ps 85:5; Ps 44:5) and king David (LXX Ps 131:1), with references to the serpent's deception of Eve (2 Cor 11:3), and Paul's strong appeal to his own heritage and tradition (being a Hebrew, an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, 2 Cor 11:22)

And thirdly, in 2 Cor 10-13 Paul construed his position as one that was largely informed by practices of hegemony, which he at the same time re-appropriated for his own purposes. In chapter 10 the metaphorical focus is on weaponry and making war, and battle-imagery is used in setting the polemics of the scene as much as in subverting the positions of the powerful. In the next chapter 11, Paul recounted the suffering he experienced as physical abuse and punishment at the hands of the Jews as well as his close encounter with a Roman governor, and even from what today would be called acts of God. Paul referred to his personal situation in 2 Cor 12, and did so in pursuing the notion of strength in weakness in particular, and relating it to his concern for the community in Corinth, before returning to considerations of strength and weakness in the final chapter.

### **3.1 Mimicry and ambivalence: Paul's ideological hermeneutics (2 Cor 10)**

The ideological concerns in Paul's hermeneutics are wide-ranging and worthy of an investigation all in themselves. The brief comments here are however restricted to tracing how two concepts often used in postcolonial analysis, namely mimicry and

<sup>41</sup> In 2 Cor the Jewish feel of the letter emerges early, with the typical Jewish liturgical blessing, *berakah* (εὐλογητὸς, 2 Cor 1:3; it occurs again in 11:31). Elsewhere in the NT εὐλογητὸς is found in the epistolary greetings in Eph 1:3, 1 Pt 1:3; other occurrences are in Lk 1:68; Rom 1:28, 9:5. It is Paul's use of the Psalms, the prophets and Jeremiah in particular, and the Wisdom literature that provide the intertext for 2 Cor. Cf Young and Ford (1987:61-62). Various other scriptural episodes are recalled in 2 Cor, such as the ministry of Moses in 2 Cor 3:6-18.

<sup>42</sup> The quotation is not accompanied by an introductory formula in 2 Cor 10:17 as is the case in 1 Cor 1:31 – Stanley surmises that mindful of its earlier use, the audience would probably have recognised it as a quotation (Stanley 2004:98 n1).

<sup>43</sup> The reach of this law of evidence (in addition to Dt 19:15, cf also Dt 17:6) in 1<sup>st</sup> CE Jewish society is difficult to determine, but its echoes have surfaced twice with reference to Jesus in a Synoptic and the Fourth Gospel, viz Mt 18:16 and Jn 8:17.

ambivalence, functions in his discourse of power but more particularly how these concepts provide important angles for understanding his use of the Scriptures. An investigation of the (influence of) ideological concerns<sup>44</sup> on various aspects of Paul's hermeneutical enterprise and the centrality of such concerns in his rhetoric of power, stand to benefit from the awareness of ambivalence inherent to the imperial or hegemonic situation. Amidst hegemony signs of destabilisation and subversion are generally present, because ambivalence of hegemony distorts the seemingly simple and straightforward claims of imperial discourse. Disclosing ambivalence poses “an immanent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledge and disciplinary powers” (Bhabha 1994:86).

Paul's argument in 2 Corinthians 10 in defence of his ministry is an interestingly strong discourse with strong ideological undertones. As a carefully structured rhetorical argument it boils down to a double challenge, to the powers of the day represented by the opponents and also to the accompanying, operational rhetoric of power. The direct references are to an “engagement in a battle which is not fleshly” (οὐ κατὰ σάρκα στρατευόμεθα, 10:3), and to weapons which are “not fleshly”: “for the weapons of our battle is not fleshly but divinely powerful to the extent of destroying strongholds” not fought with “fleshly weapons” (τὰ γὰρ ὄπλα τῆς στρατείας ἡμῶν οὐ σαρκικὰ ἀλλὰ δυνατὰ τῷ θεῷ πρὸς καθαίρεσιν ὀχυρωμάτων, 10:4).<sup>45</sup> This leads Paul to further challenge “arguments” (λογισμοὺς, 10:4) and every “proud obstacle” (ὑψώμα ἐπαυρόμενον, 10:5) which were offered in opposition to the knowledge of God.

Paul's taking up the terminology of the powerful, and turning it to his own purposes can be understood as catachresis. Catachresis<sup>46</sup> is a concept introduced by Spivak in postcolonial thought to refer to the recycling or redeployment of colonial and imperial culture and propaganda by the colonised for their own purposes. Catachresis is therefore at once an act of creative appropriation in turning the rhetorical instruments of their owners against them, a strategy of counter-appropriation which redirects and reflects the appropriative incursions of imperialist discourse, and a device of

<sup>44</sup> Ideology is of course “a source of social power” and rather than a supplementary or secondary aspect thereof, ideology is “integral to the multiple, varied, and overlapping networks of power that constitute society” (Cameron 1991:11, referring to Mann).

<sup>45</sup> In the later Pauline tradition, warfare is comprehensively spiritualised and came to represent the Christian life; it was picked up e.g. by the claim in Eph 6:12ff that warfare is not against “flesh and blood”.

<sup>46</sup> Originally, a Greek term meaning “misuse” or “misapplication” (cf Moore 2006:105).

subversive adaptation since it creates a parody through strategic misrepresentation (Moore 2006:106).<sup>47</sup>

Paul's mimicry of Empire did not stand aloof from the biblical traditions but was authorised through the inclusion of references to the Scriptures of Israel in his argumentation. Moreover, the biblical traditions formed the broader perimeters of his position,<sup>48</sup> including but going beyond the quotation from Jer 9:22-23 in 2 Cor 10:17 ( Ὁ δὲ καυχώμενος ἐν κυρίῳ καυχάσθω, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord").<sup>49</sup> In Paul's rhetoric of weakness, which reminds of his claims in 1 Cor 1 in particular, he aimed to expose the self-pride and arrogance of the opponents. The contrast is not set up between Paul and the opponents, but between God's power and wisdom and the weakness and folly of the opponents. Criticising the opponents' reliance upon wisdom, riches and strength<sup>50</sup> Paul cites Jeremiah's criticism of any pride, which is not rooted in the glory given by God (Young and Ford 1987:72-74).

At a certain level then Paul also appropriated the imperial sensibilities of his day in dealing with issues of authority and power in 2 Corinthians, and mimicked the Empire. Mimicry<sup>51</sup> refers to the imposition of the coloniser's culture on the colonised, which resulted not only in the coercing of the colonised but also included the enticement of the coloniser's culture, all of which aims at its internalisation and replication of it by the colonised. The replication is however not perfect and neither is it so intended by the coloniser since it would erase the all-important boundaries of power between coloniser and colonised. The discourse of mimicry is governed by a further ambivalence, in that it entails the risk for the coloniser that the colonised would use the very mimicry to mock and therefore subtly challenge and subvert the

<sup>47</sup> In 2 Cor 12:2 Paul was again "playing the fool", and thus refrained from referring to himself directly and downplayed his own accomplishments (cf Betz), which amounted to more than using irony to vindicate himself rather than consciously following a Stoic line of argumentation (so Martin 1986:389). Cf McCant (1999:13-15) on 2 Cor 10-13 as parody.

<sup>48</sup> Echoes of texts such as Zech 4:6 "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, said the Lord of hosts" reverberate in 2 Cor 10-13, and when Deut 19:15 is quoted in 2 Cor 13:1 in support of Paul's claim that his visit to Corinth, it aimed to show beyond doubt that Paul derives his power from God through Christ, since he (Christ) "was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God" (13:4a).

<sup>49</sup> Generally speaking, "boasting" (καυχάομαι, καύχησις and καύχημα) in the first 9 chapters is used positively, appropriate boasting, and in 2 Cor 10-13 for inappropriate, i.e. vindictive or apologetic boasting (cf Young and Ford 1987:13-14; denying the difference in use in the earlier and latter parts of 2 Cor, cf Harris 2005:33). Καυχάομαι is used 37 times in the NT, 35 times of which in Paul and 17 times in 2 Cor 10-12 alone (cf Harris 2005:726 n113).

<sup>50</sup> The destruction of the wisdom of the wise and the pride of the high and mighty are important themes also in Isaiah (e.g. Is 29:14; 2:10-17).

<sup>51</sup> "Colonial mimicry" is a concept coined by Homi Bhabha (1994:85-92). Rieger (2007:20 n37) disputes Bhabha's insistence that the ambivalence flowing from mimicry is necessarily a surface effect, arguing that it can in addition to surface effect also be symptomatic of repression (in the Freudian sense) since Rieger does not see these to be mutually exclusive particular in the connection (and confusion) between metaphoric and the metonymic axes.

control and authority of the coloniser while subverting the coloniser's narcissistic claim to self-identity (Bhabha 1994:85-92). Mimicry is therefore not only ambivalent through its insistence and desistence of mimesis but also constitute the risk for colonisers of having their culture parodied (Moore 2006:110). While Paul's mimicry of Empire may create the impression that he internalised and replicated the coloniser's culture, it is the ambivalence of colonial or hegemonic discourses which he employed to his own advantage.<sup>52</sup> In his discourse of power, Paul mimicked empire through a twofold rhetoric: of foolishness and, especially, of weakness.

### ***3.2 Hermeneutics and Othering: Weakness and Paul's politics of difference (2 Cor 11)***

From a postcolonial perspective, the processes of assuming or describing human existence as identity are complex, and entail the acknowledgement that "cultural and political identity are constructed through a process of alterity"<sup>53</sup> (Bhabha 1994:175). The notion of alterity is indeed also important in Paul's letters, which were largely based upon a hermeneutical approach informed by an apocalyptic interpretation of the Christ-events (cf recently Ehrensperger 2005:234; Roetzel 2003; also Young and Ford 1987: 122-124),<sup>54</sup> all of which already anticipated radical otherness. The present, contemporary world ruled by the Roman Empire was seen as the evil age and thus the domain of Satan.<sup>55</sup> Paul's accused his opponents in 2 Cor 11:13-15<sup>56</sup> of excelling in subterfuge and trickery since as "his slaves/servants", they, like their master Satan who "disguises himself as an angel of the light" (2 Cor 11:14), disguise themselves as "slaves" or "servants of righteousness" (2 Cor 2:15).<sup>57</sup> This is of

<sup>52</sup> As was shown by Castelli (1991), mimesis was an important mechanism through which Paul stabilised his own discourse of power.

<sup>53</sup> The greatest form of epistemic violence for postcolonial theorists is the project according to which the colonial subject is established as "the Other" (Spivak 1995:24-25).

<sup>54</sup> Although there is a tension in Paul's apocalyptically focussed approach to Scripture, it did not simply amount to a "simplification" as much as the inclusive tendencies" in his hermeneutic cannot be ascribed to his gospel only (so Roetzel 2003:36). Was it maybe the universalistic focus of Paul's shared apocalyptic framework which nudged him towards some form of inclusivity in his interpretation of Scripture?

<sup>55</sup> Satan (σατανᾶς) is mentioned relatively frequently in 2 Cor. In 2:11 Paul linked his forgiveness of offenders to avoiding the Satan gaining advantage over the followers of Christ. The reference to ὄφις (serpent) who deceived Eve in 11:3 is most likely also to Satan, underlining the deceitfulness of the imperial day and age. In 12:7 it is the "thorn in Paul's flesh" which is described as a messenger of Satan. Elsewhere in the authentic Pauline letters, references to Satan can be found only in Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 5:5, 7:5; and 1 Th 2:18; cf in the deuterio-Paulines: 2 Th 2:9; 1 Tim 1:20, 5:15. Devil (διδάβολος) does not occur in the authentic letters, but only in the deuterio-Pauline letters (Eph 4:27, 6:11; 1 Tim 3:6,7,11; 2 Tim 2:26, 3:3; Ti 2:3).

<sup>56</sup> It forms the conclusion to 2 Cor 10:1-11:15 with its numerous accusations against the opponents: not submissive to Christ; no authority from God; claiming success without having been appointed to Corinth; professing a different Gospel; proving to be a financial burden to the Corinthians; and, being deputies of Satan and deceitful operators (cf Harris 2005:664).

<sup>57</sup> In the Wisdom literature and the Psalms the trickery and the deceit of the wicked are also important topics, and while their challenge is directed at the upright person, their actions are indicative of their ignorance about God and that all wisdom proceeds from God (Ecclus 1:1, 11). "Boasting" is outside of Psalms and Jeremiah an important concept in the Wisdom

course not to claim that Paul directly equated his opponents in Corinth or elsewhere with the Roman authorities and their local minions, or to suggest that Paul identified the Roman Empire or emperor with Satan. It is however important to be alert to Paul's first century context where politics were perceived broadly (distant, uninfluencible and overpowering power) and narrowly (rules and regulations, e.g. taxes, legal, movement) at the same time, and where contrasting, opposing and negative were conflated and perceived to reflect various sides of the same coin. These tensions emerge in an interesting way in Paul's construction of his own identity – through othering!

When Paul constructed his identity in 2 Cor 11 he did so with consistent reference to himself as the Other, construing himself from and with reference to a position of weakness.<sup>58</sup> In 2 Cor 11 Paul accounted the suffering he experienced as physical abuse and punishment at the hands of the Jews (ὕπὸ Ἰουδαίων, 11:24), by enumerating five lashings, three beatings with rods, and one stoning, but also the timeous escape from persecution by King Aretas, governor of Damascus (11:32-33),<sup>59</sup> and finally also his experiences from acts of God, after been shipwrecking and adrift at sea (11:25). Paul's catalogue of sufferings in 2 Cor 11:25-28 included references to various other dangers, brought about by his journeys: dangers experienced due to travel ways ("rivers"), antagonism ("robbers", his "own people" [ἐκ γένους], "Gentiles" [ἐξ ἔθνων], "false brethren"), location ("city", "wilderness" and "at sea"), and, circumstances ("toil and hardship", "sleepless nights", "hunger and thirst", "often without food", "in cold and exposed").

Paul's catalogue of sufferings at the hands of humans and nature or God also established a link between identity and agency. In contemporary thought, subjectivity is firmly fixed in language, and therefore an all-important question is, "how can one account for the capacity of the subject in a post-colonial society to resist imperialism and thus to intervene in the conditions which appear to construct subjectivity itself?" (Slemon 1995:10). Paul's argument in 2 Cor 11 has to be read in tandem with 2 Cor

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literature (Young and Ford 1987:78-80).

<sup>58</sup> "Paul's own life modelled authority and power in stark contrast to the authority and power of the Roman Empire", becoming "a fool, weak, poor, a victim of torture and homeless" (Rieger 2007:51 with reference to 2 Cor 11:21-27)

<sup>59</sup> According to his own testimony, Paul was often on the wrong side of the (local) law for disturbing the peace of being a public menace, and therefore appearing before magistrates and spending time in jail (cf Phm 1,9,13; Phil 1:7, 12-14, 16; 1 Th 2:2; 1 Cor 4:9; 2 Cor 1:8-9; 11:23). Cf Elliott (1994:183).

12, and was construed in such a way that the confirmation of human frailty and mortality made it perfectly clear to whom he ascribed the role of being the source of life and power (Young and Ford 1987:63). The same sentiment which is expressed in an autobiographical reference in 2 Cor 12:9-10, was echoed in Paul's confidence as grounded on the one hand in the resurrection of Christ. At the same time but on the other hand, it was the confidence of the Psalmist<sup>60</sup> which he appropriated, "having the same spirit of faith as he who had wrote" (Ἐχοντες δὲ τὸ αὐτὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πίστεως κατὰ τὸ γεγραμμένον, 2 Cor 4:13).

The strong appeal Paul made to the events in Cor 11 through which he established his alterity,<sup>61</sup> characterised by weakness, implied that this catalogue of events was much more than a distraction. In fact, Paul turned the reference to these events to his advantage, having them serve as a recommendation for him, and probably also for the particular gospel-message he preached. Paul's rhetoric of weakness and powerlessness was central to his discourse of power, challenging imperial discourse while establishing his own, and dependent upon biblical traditions. The conceptualisation and portrayal of textual and personal "others" in Paul's hermeneutical enterprise is not restricted to the adversaries, but functions here also autobiographically, with Paul's identity-construction informed by broader sentiments from the biblical traditions. While the "acts of God" could probably be explained more easily within a context undergirded by notions of testing in order to be proven worthy, à la the biblical and also some philosophical traditions, it is the open acknowledgement and to some extent his valorisation of the conflict with local Roman authorities than is remarkable, particularly in how Paul used this conflict to inform and describe his identity.

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<sup>60</sup> While Paul did not model his argument on the Psalms, his embeddedness in the Scriptures included the importance of the Psalms in his thoughts, and in 2 Cor specifically the Hallel Psalms (LXX Pss 112-117) which were used in the synagogues at the great festivals (Young and Ford 1987:68-69). The great festivals also had important political angles related to God saving acts and the demise of the political enemies of Israel and the Jews (cf the brief summary in Perkins 1988:46-48). Theologically Paul more directly modelled his rhetoric of weakness on the model of Jesus as Paul chose to depict him in Phil 2:6-11 in particular.

<sup>61</sup> Some scholars have argued that Paul challenged and effectively neutralised the hierarchical categories of the time with their marginalising effect, without however erasing difference between the categories, and claims that "oneness in Christ" subverted both "repressive sameness" and "imperial oneness" (e.g. Kahl 2000:37-49). Other scholars see this temporal subversion reflected in Paul's notion about the displacement of the elements of the world (Gal 4:3,9) through knowledge of God (Martyn 1997:100-101; 393-406).

### **3.3 Identity and hybridity: Foolishness and Paul's politics of identity (1 Cor 12:11)**

Hybridity is an important concept in postcolonial thought, but here the focus is on the hybrid character of the hermeneutics typically operative in postcolonial contexts, as it seeks to come to terms with the “complex psychic interpenetration of coloniser and colonised” (Moore 2006:109). Hybridity in identity and hermeneutics goes beyond considering what can be called a weak sense of hybridity, boiling down to the notion of culture as essentially syncretistic – however true that may in any case be at general level. From the outset therefore, such concerns imply that any discussion on Paul and hybridity<sup>62</sup> should be cautious of demanding too much from a well-known text such as his “I have become all things to all men” (τοῖς πᾶσιν γέγονα πάντα, 1 Cor 9:22b). Nor should the discussion of Paul's multicultural (pluricultural) identity be restricted to the confluence of his Jewish background or identity infused with Hellenism generally, and probably other more specific Greco-Roman influences such as his education and probable Roman citizenship status.<sup>63</sup> At any rate, and as was the case in later Christian discourse, Paul's discourse is not characterised as much by radical uniqueness but rather by creative inventiveness, where the familiar is taken over and reworked or (re-)appropriated, where the known is used to indicate and formulate the unknown (Cameron 1991:25). It will probably elicit little resistance to claim that appeals to and the use of the Scriptures of Israel function as an important component in Paul's re-appropriating discourse.

Hybridity is indeed a helpful concept to articulate the multiple and complex range of activities taking place in negotiating identity in the postcolonial context, attempting to understand the effects of the engagement between coloniser and colonised. In fact, it is in hybridity that liminality is established, in what Bhabha calls a “third space” which neither subsumes the culture of the coloniser or colonised nor merely merges the two. Hybridity also does not imply a separate third culture<sup>64</sup> but rather a process of continuous construction or formation and deconstruction of cultures, with the

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<sup>62</sup> The postcolonial situation which consists of the relationship between colonisers and colonised is one of ambivalence, entailing the simultaneous attraction to *and* repulsion by empire (cf Bhabha 1994:123-138).

<sup>63</sup> Paul's claim in Phil 3:4-11 about giving up claims based on his Jewish descent and heritage, which received recognition from the Roman Empire accompanied by some privileges, is at times interpreted to illustrate Paul's distancing himself from Empire (Rieger 2007:51) but the claim requires more attention within Paul's rhetoric of weakness.

<sup>64</sup> And, as Bhabha stresses (1994:173), “the incommensurability of cultural values and priorities that the postcolonial critic represents cannot be accommodated within theories of cultural relativism or pluralism”.

corresponding acknowledgement that cultures are always firstly constructed but as importantly, never “pure, prior, original, unified or self-contained; it is always infected by mimicry, self-splitting, and alterity. In a word, it is always already infected by hybridity” (Bhabha 1994:19-39, esp 37-39; Moore 2006:111). Hybridity informs and marks also Paul’s argument about wisdom in the Corinthians letters,<sup>65</sup> generally, and 2 Cor 12 in particular.

In 2 Cor 12:11 Paul claims Γέγονα ἄφρων (I have been a fool), only five verses after he declared in 2 Cor 12:6 οὐκ ἔσομαι ἄφρων (I shall not be a fool), which all form part of his larger argument about his credentials and therefore authority as apostle. Paul’s argument is built on contesting the conventional considerations about wisdom and the basis of such considerations. His argument formed part of a larger rhetoric of wisdom and foolishness that at least partly constitutes the framework of the Corinthian correspondence as such, as a discourse of power. But Paul’s discourse of power is not disconnected from the imperial discourse. The connection between wisdom and rulers is not incidental, and Paul’s claims regarding the overturning of wisdom and folly resonates in a context where the emperors generally set great stock by learning generally, as well as more practically in the sense that the emperor constituted the ultimate and final bestower of justice (cf Millar 1977:3-14). “In short, from the very beginning of empire, there was a demand that the emperor should behave as a *basileus* who heard the petitions of his subjects and answered them with verbal or written pronouncements which were themselves effective and legal acts” (Millar 1977:11).

With his appeal to a different understanding of wisdom, and his insistence to break through that which was conventional Paul challenged the discourse of empire, and simultaneously invoked a new discourse of power through his rhetoric, both of which leaned strongly on the Scriptures of Israel for its authentication and authority. Paul’s position is contrary that of the Roman Empire, intentionally subverting it through his own rhetorical claims, but his is clearly also a position of negotiating power, as much with the discursive colonialism of the Romans as with the recipients of his letters, as

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<sup>65</sup> Without claiming a direct dependency or even authorial link, the Jer 9:22-23 quote, which also appeared in 2 Cor 10:17 provide an important intertextual link between the arguments of 1 Cor 1-3 and 2 Cor 10-13. The “boasting” notion is picked up also in e.g. 2 Cor 10:8; 11:16; 12:6.

well as with the Scriptures of Israel which is granted a new meaning through their induction into Paul's hermeneutics.

### **3.4 Marginal hermeneutics: Confluence and tension (2 Cor 13)**

The interplay between operational marginality (marginality in action) and hermeneutics is characteristically marked by a contradictory yet inherent confluence and tension between the two (marginality and hermeneutics). Marginality is inherent to hermeneutics, since the interpretative process necessarily simultaneously constructs and subverts, reinforces and destabilises, confirms and challenges, and decentres and re-centres. Marginality<sup>66</sup> refers to the condition of living on the outside, the periphery and can also include liminality, or the living in between centre and periphery, and can be constructively developed<sup>67</sup> in biblical interpretation but should not be idealised. To develop marginality and liminality constructively would imply a serious challenge to conventional interpretation, the official reading, the traditional and proper way of understanding.<sup>68</sup> However, marginality and liminality should not be idealised, because it is an imposed condition even when taken up and reconstructed by the affected, and also messy and imbued with the interests of those on the margins and in liminal positions.

It is in the first instance Paul's use of the Scriptures of Israel that illustrate such hermeneutical marginality as is evident in its production of alternative readings, in the surplus of meaning generated by his readings. In general, people who are part of the "establishment" of the time are limited and regulated by the status quo, at once provided for but also restricted to what the system can offer them, while those who find themselves outside of the system are simultaneously stumped in the possibility of or at least in the extent to which they can participate in it while, at the same time, having in their marginality access to what lies beyond the regulated system in terms of approaches and responses. An advantage of a marginal position is therefore the *alternative* perspective, from the underside, and which is not accessible from the

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<sup>66</sup> Whereas a hermeneutics of marginalisation describes the assignment of marginality from the outside, a hermeneutics of marginality refers to where marginality is taken up and creatively exploited, redrawing the boundaries, shifting centre and periphery.

<sup>67</sup> Paul's claim for his own marginality was best expressed by his list of his sufferings (2 Cor 11:25-28), making clear that Paul's marginal status was a claimed position, and that it served an important function in his discourse of power including his explicit disavowal of his opponents, to the extent of admitting to deliberately subverting them (2 Cor 11:12).

<sup>68</sup> But moreover, "the affective experience of social marginality transforms our critical strategies" (Bhabha 1992:438; 1994:172), in the sense of the dynamic power released in and through vulnerability.

mainstream. In addition to perspective, *surplus energies and enjoyment* may also be gained in a marginal position, since the surplus is at once inaccessible to those of the status quo and, importantly, in any case beyond their control and therefore subversive of the system (Rieger 2007:9). In Paul's hermeneutical endeavours he too shared in the surplus of the margins.

Secondly, it is the ambivalence of Paul's rhetoric of power that marks out the tension in his hermeneutics, not only but also in how it implicates his (re-)appropriation of the Scriptures in his arguments.<sup>69</sup> In short, Paul's argument against wisdom and strength rests on his rhetorical skill to employ and redeploy foolishness and weakness to serve his own purposes, and while deploring the conventional intellect and power as the *real* foolishness and weakness it is exactly that which he hoped to rope in for his purposes of both re-establishing his position and thus authority in the Corinthian congregation(s) as well as to subvert the contenders to his throne. The Scriptures of Israel are often the anchor point for Paul's arguments, securing and authorising his rhetoric and embedding it in the larger scriptural framework complete with divine overtones and challenging the Empire as upholder of the conventional wisdom and strength of the day in a comprehensive way. But the Scriptures are at the same time also the authorising agent for Paul's own efforts to retain his authority in power in the Corinthian church, the mainstay for his rhetoric of power.<sup>70</sup>

Paul's strong words in 2 Cor 13 take up the prophetic words of Jeremiah, claiming that for all his insistence upon weakness, Paul acts with the final authority, deciding what will remain and what will be destroyed. In 2 Cor 13:1-10 Paul again used a rhetoric of weakness, but now with the direct warning in 13:10 (and in 10:8 as well; 12:19) that he would not shrink back from exercising the authority he received from God to build up and to tear down (κατὰ τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἣν ὁ κύριος ἔδωκεν μοι εἰς οἰκοδομὴν καὶ οὐκ εἰς καθαίρεσιν). With the direct quotation of Jer 9:22-23 in 2 Cor 10:17 already indicating Paul's use of the prophetic literature in the Scriptures, the building up and

<sup>69</sup> Rather than seeing Paul retreating from engaging the Scriptures as borne out by the relatively few direct quotations, as though he conceded failure in having his scriptural interpretations found credible by the audience in Corinth (so Stanley 2004:98), Paul engaged the Scriptures even more comprehensively, with them informing his views on his apostleship and ministry (e.g. the comparison with the ministry of Moses).

<sup>70</sup> Paul clearly thought it important to invoke and allude, and more importantly, to align himself with the Psalmist's confidence in both the Lord and his own alignment with the Lord; with the prophetic claims to having received divine authority; and, with the wisdom teachers' subversion of convention and power. Paul's argument as a whole links up with and locks into these texts, even if these texts are no longer understood in a way analogous to how they were probably interpreted in their original context.

tearing down language further reminds of Jer 24:6 and 51:34. Paul aligns himself with the prophet and his authority as spokesperson of God, authorised to act on God's behalf.<sup>71</sup> Margins and centre are again shifting, with Paul reinforcing his authority amidst the challenge of the opponents, utilising the Scriptures with implications for both himself, his opponents and the other members of the Corinthian community, and the (position of the) Scriptures.

#### 4. Paul's hermeneutical challenge: Margins and Centre

It is most probably correct to argue that Paul was opposed to Caesar's empire not because it was *empire*, but because it was *Caesar's* and because Caesar claimed divine status and honours which only belong to God (Wright 2000:164). However, one further step down this road is required: to be alert to the possibility of Paul's own construction of empire in his discourse of power. The challenge is to be careful not to try so hard to rehabilitate Paul so as to become oblivious to Paul's own sense of authority and tendency to assert an own form of subtle hegemony.<sup>72</sup>

Paul's position remained ambiguous, at once the apostle to the Others in the eyes of his Jewish tradition, the marginal Jew, and challenging the hegemonic power of discursive Roman imperialism and engaging some of its agents along the way. At the same time, Paul remained keen to impose his authority and to ensure that he maintained the upper hand in the discourse of power he established and maintained throughout his letters.<sup>73</sup> And in all of this, interestingly, his use of Scripture cannot be isolated to either simply an anti-colonialist or merely a colonising role and function. Which leaves the question, in over-simplified form: Was Paul an agent of empire (Roman or otherwise), or was Paul a speaking subaltern? It is also on questions such as these that attention to Paul's hermeneutics within his discourse of power can prove helpful.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Whether Paul's purpose here is to indicate his sense of the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy (so Young and Ford 1987:70-72) is doubtful; the sanctioning effect and authority Paul's claimed is probably the primary goal here.

<sup>72</sup> On Paul's exercising his power and authority, cf Kittredge (1998); Polaski (1999).

<sup>73</sup> In Second Temple-Judaism the formation and constitution of the canon was never a focal part of the sectarian debate as it would later be the case in Christianity. However, conflicting interpretations of the Scriptures characterised Jewish sectarian self-definition also during the time of the New Testament (Cohen 1987:133-134), and this is the broader context where Paul's use of the Scriptures also needs to be located.

<sup>74</sup> Hermeneutics acknowledges if not always deals with the otherness of others, and therefore otherness and marginality are inherent to the practice of hermeneutics. Interpreters do not have the last word: "For in hermeneutics one never ceases to listen to 'the other'" in whatever form (Thiselton 2004:146). Hermeneutics' concern with otherness, marginality, and liminality are therefore not surprising but expected. But, given its intricate and complex relationship with otherness, hermeneutics is from the outset already also imbued with and caught up in issues of power, constructing interpretative positions and interests.

The hermeneutical challenge that confronted Paul was informed by the tension between centre and margins. Paul frequently opted for the margins (cf Rom 12:16; 1 Cor 1:28; Gal 2:10), and willingly provided theological rationale for his position of solidarity with the powerless by referring to the example of Christ (e.g. Phil 2:6-11). Showing Christ to be a Lord which is not in solidarity with the powerful implied that Paul positioned his discourse as a challenge to the Roman position where even Roman law favoured the elite and propertied classes (Elliott 1994:186; Rieger 2007:52). Without claiming that Paul's use of the Scriptures of Israel is exhaustively encapsulated by it, a continuing and most important concern that can be detected in the apostle's writings and in his biblical hermeneutics is the question of how to deal with this tension between centre and margins constructively without allowing the one to assume or assimilate the other, without collapsing the one into the other.

However, as Paul's rhetoric further suggests, his own convictions, ideals and motivation was naturally not without his own presuppositions and biases, informed by what seems to have been his robust conscience (cf Stendahl). On the one hand, Paul's mimicry of empire and his hybrid identity formed and informed by empire and biblical hermeneutics among others implied some marginalisation for him, and ensured his liminality and explains his sense of transition, of in-between-ness to some extent. On the other hand, Paul's discourse of power informed by a rhetoric of weakness (e.g. Phil 2:5-11; 2 Cor 10-13) as well as a rhetoric of foolishness (e.g. 1 Cor 1-4), which served both as a challenge to imperial discourse and as authority and sanction for securing his own discourse of power.

## 5. Conclusion<sup>75</sup>

Paul's letters issued a strong if subtle challenge to the Roman Empire, supported and authorised by and (to some extent) built upon the results of his interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel by enlisting the scriptural framework and specific quotations to boot to prove the veracity of his message and apostleship. However, at the same

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<sup>75</sup> This paper had neither the intention to literary-redactionally consider the nature or approach, method or technique or effect of Paul's use of the Scriptures of Israel in his own letters, nor to consider and offer plausible theories for the socio-historical settings of Paul's letters including the composition and competency of the possible audiences that could plausibly explain his use of the Scriptures. While these will probably for the foreseeable future remain important avenues of investigation, this paper was an (admittedly first brief and cursory) attempt to deal with the role of (the use of) the Scriptures by Paul in an imperialist, and marginal context, and further to investigate their invocation amidst broader and narrower discourses of power which Paul maintained or endured, but in any case interacted with.

time Paul was implicated is his discourse of power, in which quotations from Scripture also served to underwrite *his* claims, authorise *his* position and justify *his* arguments and position.<sup>76</sup> In Paul's understanding, he was so thoroughly entangled with and connected to the Scriptures, that his adversaries' stance towards Paul reflected their stance towards the Scriptures.<sup>77</sup> In addition, since the Scriptures of Israel carried divine authority, Paul obtained no less than divine sanction for his mission and message through the direct and indirect claims he made for his hermeneutics and use of the Scriptures of Israel.

How useful is it then to use postcolonial criticism for understanding Pauline hermeneutics, as a particular manifestation of first-century hermeneutics found in the New Testament? Especially since postcolonial criticism is a properly modern endeavour, bearing "witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authorities within the modern world order" (Bhabha 1992:487)? In short, the particular advantage of a postcolonial approach is to highlight the interactive relationships that form coloniser and colonised while also providing conceptual, analytical tools for their investigation, and in the case of Paul, to explore how Paul's challenge to the powers that be – imperial and otherwise – possibly also rubbed off onto him, influencing also his stance and shaping his response to the powerful as well as framing his perspective generally.

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<sup>76</sup> Space does not allow for it here, but on the topic of marginalisation the (position of the) Scriptures of Israel should of course also be considered. Paul's use of texts and themes from the Scriptures necessarily displaced these from their scriptural framework, but moreover (to some extent at least) upset the framework as a whole, as e.g. Boyarin (1994) points out when he accuses Paul of allegorising away the uniqueness of Israelite history and Jewish life. Cf also Stanley (1994:28-29 regarding Meir Sternberg's work on the displacement effect of quotations).

<sup>77</sup> And since Stanley (2004:40) is probably right in arguing that the authority of the Scriptures was widely acknowledged in the early Christian church, Paul's appeals to the Scriptures greatly contributed to his powerful position in the early church.

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Printed on 10/11/07