BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME:

APOCALYPSE, COLONIALISM, AND

THE STUDY OF RELIGION

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Jesse McKenzie Bailey

Regina, Saskatchewan

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Jesse McKenzie Bailey, candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in Religious Studies, has presented a thesis titled, *Bringing It All Back Home: Apocalypse, Colonialism, and The Study of Religion*, in an oral examination held on September 5, 2012. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

External Examiner: Dr. Russell T. McCutcheon, University of Alabama

Supervisor: Dr. William Arnal, Department of Religious Studies

Committee Member: Dr. Franz Volker Greifenhagen, Department of Religious Studies

Committee Member: Dr. Darlene Juschka, Department of Women & Gender Studies

Chair of Defense: Dr. Emily Eaton, Department of Geography
Abstract

In the study of religion, it will not take long before students come across the term “apocalypse” or “apocalypticism.” The place that such terms have made in the study of religion suggests that they refer to very tangible aspects of religious traditions. Moreover, the vast majority of scholarship, by way of comparison, reinforces the idea that the category apocalypse and apocalypticism represent a genre of writing native to Christianity and Judaism. Thus, studies of so-called apocalyptic texts often engage in comparisons of other “apocalyptic” materials contained within the Judeo-Christian tradition. These studies often base their comparisons on literary themes, and in the process participate in the tacit reification of the *sui generis* category of apocalypse.

In an attempt to approach apocalypticism and the category apocalypse in a different light, and using the Book of Revelation as a model, this study attempts to account for the social and historical roots of apocalyptic texts as they occur under conditions of foreign domination.

Comprised essentially of two primary sections, this analysis begins by establishing the theoretical framework first by considering the context of colonialism as a discourse that defines the social and political environment in question, and second by establishing the intellectual framework of this analysis in postcolonial and performance theory. By utilizing these theoretical frameworks it is possible to analyze the complex sets of relationships that are active in the colonial frontier.

The second half of this analysis is concerned exclusively with historical data. First, by describing the provincial territories under the Roman Empire, discussing first
how Rome represented itself as a legitimate form of rule for its subjects, and second how provincial cults interpreted their new political circumstances. As a final provocation this analysis will conclude with a selective comparison of the book of Revelation with the modern American political movement known as the Tea Party. In this analysis, we will look specifically at how the social and political concerns of both Revelation and the rhetoric and language of the Tea Party find similar expressions in their respective discourses.

In addition to the similarities of the respective data, this thesis will also argue that categories such as “apocalypse” and “religion” mystify the data in question, placing it outside the confines of the intelligible, social world.
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Dedication

For all the conversations had, and many more that would have been, this thesis is dedicated to my mother, Nancy.
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1. Introduction

In the late 1970s and early 1980s much attention and energy was dedicated to the study of apocalypse in religious/biblical literature. The site of these efforts was the Society of Biblical Literature, and the fruits of these labours resulted in (among others) the production of two journal issues that spoke authoritatively on the subject of apocalypse: Semeia 14 (1979) and Semeia 36 (1986). The aim of the respective works was to consider various ancient—and virtually without exception—Judeo-Christian writings often described in some fashion or another as an apocalypse, and from here develop a description of the genre apocalypse. The selection and critique of the writings allowed the apocalypse group of 1979 to formulate the following definition of apocalypse:

“Apocalypse” is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.¹

While the definition suggested by Collins and others of the apocalypse group may not represent the final word on what constitutes the genre apocalypse, they do concede that this guideline serves to mark the general boundaries and “see the variety within the genre and distinguish different types of apocalypses.”² What we have here is the initial demarcation of a category that can continuously be populated with data that share in the prescriptions of said category. Following the cue of Semeia 14, the efforts of the

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² Collins (1979), 10.
apocalypse group in the 1980s under the direction of Adela Yarbro Collins sought to “confer about ways to pursue the study of the genre apocalypse with special reference to early Christianity.”

While there are many problems with the discussion of the genre apocalypse that could be brought to the forefront, the problem of the categorization and reification of ancient literatures as apocalyptic is of immediate concern here. When we classify phenomena, we seek to understand it, to give it place. The problem is that by giving it place, we are always moving our data ever so slightly, obscuring it slightly more than it was before as we place it within a more general category. The problem is not the practice of classification and categorization in general, but rather, the approach that suggests classification and categorization as a teleology, in other words, the study and development of a category or genre of particular phenomena in hopes that the establishment and population of said category should, in itself, tell us something interesting about our data.

In the case of the genre apocalypse, scholars collected ancient texts and populated the category apocalypse by virtue of their perceived shared traits. The problem is that the establishment and enforcement of the category apocalypse serves to mystify what are often thought to be very strange and bewildering texts. Questions about the strange writings are then answered by the category apocalypse, and the definition of said category is simply a regurgitation of what is found in the text. Why does this book talk about the end of the world and final cosmic judgment? Well, that is because it is an

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apocalypse. What is an apocalypse? An apocalypse, among other things, is a genre of writing concerned with eschatological salvation through the involvement of the supernatural world. It is not difficult to see the circular nature implicit in the category of apocalypse. At the same time this in not the only problem with the category. Such classifications also serve to mystify the data in question, suggesting that these are not texts that can be located in specific contexts; these classifications pull the datum from human experience and stash it away in a box with other things that demonstrate similar characteristics. This is done in two distinct steps: first, the establishment of the category apocalypse as a substantive category in itself. From the outset this category is meant to tell us something about the data in question. Secondly, the criteria by which the data are selected are based on internal, essential characteristics that supposedly justify their placement. They are arranged together because they are thought to share some essential features with one another. Herein lies the mystification of the data: they become alienated from lived, social histories and instead are enshrined in a category that is based on arbitrary associations.

While this current study in concerned with datum traditionally classified as apocalyptic, the genre of apocalypse is one that does not inform this study as it proceeds. Insofar as such a category mystifies its data, effectively removing it from lived, human experience, this study seeks to do the opposite. Operating under the assumption that an apocalypse is an example of something utterly human, this analysis attempts to take into account the social, political, and historical circumstances that give way to lived experiences often termed “apocalyptic.” By abandoning categories that obscure the view
of our data, this analysis seeks to access “apocalyptic” materials, using the book of Revelation as a model, by tracing their path through the lived history of the text.

Consisting principally of two parts, this analysis will begin by establishing the theoretical framework first by considering the context of colonialism, and second by establishing the intellectual context of this analysis in postcolonial theory. In the second half of this analysis we will look exclusively at the historical data; first by describing the provincial territories under the Roman Empire discussing first how Rome represented itself as a legitimate form of rule for its subjects, and secondly how provincial cults interpreted their new political circumstances. Finally, we will conclude this analysis with a comparison of the book of Revelation with the modern American political movement known as the Tea Party. In this analysis, we will look specifically at how the social and political concerns of both Revelation and the rhetoric and language of the Tea Party find similar expressions in their respective discourses.
2. Setting the Margins: Colonial Discourse and the Construction of Identity

However indispensible binary oppositions may be for the conduct of human thought, they are also elementary instruments of discrimination.

--Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth* (118)

“Things ain’t never gonna change in this town, Aibileen. We living in hell, we *trapped*. Our kids is trapped.”

The setting is Jackson, Mississippi in the 1960s, and approximately halfway through Kathryn Stockett’s 2009 novel, the words of Minny Jackson are full of despair. The recent murder of the NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers sets the immediate context, and yet one cannot help but think that these feelings of desperation run deeper than the immediate news of his death. Minny and her friend Aibileen have recently begun collaborating on a project to document their experiences as African American maids in Jackson, and the tension that this project places on her shoulders is certainly the most relevant detail that underwrites Minny’s despairing comment. At the request of a young, aspiring *white* writer, Eugenia “Skeeter” Phelan, the two women have obliged to assist in providing Skeeter with the details of their past (and present) experiences working in the homes of various white residents of Jackson.

While the narrative revolves around the interpersonal relationships in Jackson, the struggle of African Americans in civil-rights era America is definitely the context of novel, and Stockett draws upon these themes in her narrative. Yet this image does not complete the picture for the desperation of Minny. It is not merely the universal struggle of African Americans in America that has filled her with a sense of despair. Certainly the

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death of Medgar Evers, and the fear that no justice will come from his shooting is weighing on Minny, since the violence that found Evers could easily be extended to anyone. This does not, however, complete the image of despair we see in Minny. Her covert engagement in collaborating on a controversial subject has placed her in a dangerous position. There is equally then the fear of the consequences of their white employers if they learn of Minny and the others openly addressing the domestic dynamics of Jackson. The threat of losing their livelihoods (or worse) is an obvious consequence to their involvement, but the concerns of the two are not restricted to a simple black-white binary. The secrecy that surrounds the project is also designed to protect Minny and Aibileen from their fellow maids, since their involvement with Skeeter could potentially ostracize them from their respective communities as well. Finally, it is Minny’s fear of her husband, Leroy, and the intense physical consequences she would face if he learned about her involvement in the project, “Lord help me if he finds out what I’m doing with Miss Skeeter.”

Minny’s reasons for feeling vulnerable are numerous, extending beyond the confines of race alone. Stockett works tirelessly throughout the narrative to suggest that the context of The Help is not a unidirectional struggle between white and black, but rather, it is a field of play, where multiple factors such as class, gender, and race all contribute to the colonial situation.

Written in 2009, Stockett’s novel stands 150 years from the civil war and 50 years from the civil rights movement, yet the relevance of this topic remains in the collective

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5 Stockett (2009), 259.
consciousness enough to warrant a “#1 New York Times Bestseller” banner across the cover of the book. While the story seems to depict the tradition of African American racism throughout the course of the narrative, the greater picture Stockett’s novel seems to point toward is the issue of American colonialism. The importation of Black slaves via the transatlantic slave route, and the subsequent class distinctions in American society forms the subtext of Stockett’s story, since the class-based division of labor is at the heart of her novel.

Whether or not Stockett intended her book to be read as a meditation on American colonialism, this is certainly one of the results, and the popularity of this novel suggests that issues of colonialism remain relevant for discussion long after so-called “rights” have been achieved. Furthermore, it suggests that the dynamics of such situations are never straightforward. The colonial situation cannot be reduced to a simple vector. It is an area with multiple - and often competing - factors that must be taken into account. Therefore if it is our aim to approach the colonial context of antiquity in which we find the book of Revelation, we must do so by first clearly enunciating the colonial environment with details that exceed perfunctory designations of domination and subjugation. It is with this in mind that we turn our attention to the idea of colonialism itself.

While issues of domination and subjugation are certainly present in the discourse of colonization, there is much more at play in the relationship between the two entities as they meet on the “frontier.” “In an open frontier zone, contact can produce conflict, but it can also occasion new forms of cooperation and exchange.” In his book *Savage Systems*,

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David Chidester explored the relations of the European colonizing effort in Southern Africa in an effort to explore the colonial contact zone as it relates to the “production of knowledge about religion and religions.” While there are many topics of interest that are ripe for investigation, Chidester is primarily concerned with the relationship between the colonizing force of the Europeans and the indigenous Southern African inhabitants as it pertains to the understanding of indigenous “religions.”

One detail that initiates Chidester’s analysis was the observation that the initial encounters Europeans had with the indigenous people of Southern Africa often led to European assertions that these people were devoid of any religion. He comments that “[i]n the eastern Cape during the first half of the nineteenth century, missionaries consistently reported that the Xhosa-speaking people had no religion whatsoever. They were echoed in this assessment by travelers, settlers, and magistrates in the region.”

These observations about the Xhosa people were echoed in colonial documentation on various other indigenous groups in their early interactions with Europeans.

The key to this curious quality lay, by Chidester’s analysis, in tracing a correlation between the initial European presence in these “frontier contact zones,” and the establishment of colonial authority over various indigenous people:

After the establishment of the Dutch station in 1652, the Hottentots who were engaged in trading with the company, supplying much of its meat and produce, were suddenly discovered to have a religion, one based on the worship of the moon. In the 1680s, however, when the boundaries of the initial Dutch settlement began to expand, the Hottentots on a new, contested frontier were once again characterized as lacking any trace of religion. By the beginning of the 1700s, when their resistance had largely been contained

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7 Chidester (1996), 21.
and their population had been drastically diminished by disease, the Hottentots were again credited with a religion.\textsuperscript{9}

For Chidester it is specifically the process of drawing boundaries where one can trace the construction of knowledge and power in the colonial context of Southern Africa. Even the act of naming various indigenous groups as “Hottentot” and “Zulu” was an act of colonial construction; an external, colonial effort to draw boundaries and categorize in a way that represents no real or natural reflection of people living in these lands prior to European contact.\textsuperscript{10} Nevertheless, the drawing of boundaries ensued, and from the colonial perspective, disparate data sets were made intelligible by constructing boundaries; “[f]rom the drawing of boundaries, knowledge followed.”\textsuperscript{11}

Thoroughly problematizing the issue of classification in a colonial setting, Henrietta Lidchi argues that in the work of ethnographies, and more generally in the classifications in the colonial setting, the artificial distinctions that are made are based not on truths objectively observed in the colonial context, but distinctions manufactured “on the basis of a certain representation of this difference, and subsequently uses this typology to determine whom it seeks to study and what the best research methods to employ might be.”\textsuperscript{12} In the case of the colonial frontier in Africa, the rubric set forth by Lidchi suggests that from the outset, apprehending the indigenous people of Southern

\textsuperscript{9} Chidester (1996), 23. This observation also holds true for the Xhosa-speaking people, who were found to have religion “only after they had been subjected to colonial domination.” \textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{10} Chidester (1996), 22.

\textsuperscript{11} Chidester (1996), 26.

Africa inevitably meant apprehending a certain representation of them (a problem that will be explored later in this analysis), and the host of meanings that were already associated with them. Thus, the boundaries created by colonialists can be understood as both artificial – in that they do not reflect any “natural” or “real” geographical, linguistic or cultural markers, but also that the composers of said boundaries were already affected by certain representations of their subject matter.

The “boundary drawing,” or classification of Southern African indigenous people brings to light major issues in the colonial situation. The observation of the artificiality of these boundaries and classifications notwithstanding, issues of essentializing the indigenous populations as people “without religion” is a prominent issue that stands out in Chidester’s analysis. As becomes clear in his argument, these boundaries and classifications are not merely epistemological in their nature, but have their own role to play in the colonial mission. Beyond establishing a system of classifications of Southern African peoples, the colonizing effort sought to classify the African people in an effort to understand and situate them in relation to the colonial bodies.13 Virtually without exception this sort of classification takes the form of “like us, not like us,” or more specifically in this case taking the form of “not like us, therefore, less than us.”

One of the most effective modes in establishing the “less than us” discourse in Southern Africa was, as has been observed, the positing of the idea that there is no “religion” among the indigenous peoples. This classification of heathen (and later pagan) carries a purpose beyond the establishment of knowledge. The case of the Hottentot or

13 The colonial bodies referring to the project of colonialism that was undertaken not only by the British, but by many others, including the Dutch, French, and others.
Khoikhoi people is a key example, where the identification of an absence of religion on the part of European colonizers is directly linked to a justification of the expansion of colonial interests in the so-called African frontier:

The denial of the religious character of the Hottentots, however, was not sufficient to assert European dominance on the expanding Cape frontier. Once again, denial of religion supported a more basic denial of the humanity of the Hottentots... Like animals, without reason, the Hottentots were characterized in the 1690s as “the very Reverse of Human kind,” an inverted image of the European human beings asserting their claims to land, livestock, and labor within an expanding frontier.¹⁴

In this way the utility of classification on the part of the colonizing force becomes clear. The fluctuation of classifications of indigenous peoples as “without religion” and “with religion” were not random changes in perception of the people on the part of colonizers, but rather reflect European interests in an expanding colonial frontier. If, in the process of expanding their control over the lands of the frontier, the Europeans encountered local “tribal” peoples, dispossessing them of the lands they inhabit could not really be any crime, since these people are not like us and do not feel like us; they are more akin to the animals we hunt and farm.¹⁵

Nevertheless, with the expansion of colonial boundaries and through the containment of various indigenous people, the classification of various indigenous people slowly changed from people “without religion” to people “with religion.” This does not, however, signal a change in the tides of colonial interests in the African frontier. If the containment of indigenous peoples through the boundaries created by Europeans (both

¹⁴ Chidester (1996), 45-46.

¹⁵ Chidester (1996), 46. Chidester notes that the identification of indigenous people with animals was present among colonizing forces and indeed was a part of the justification behind the colonial mission.
epistemological and physical) bestowed the concession of religion on the people, then a slightly different discourse surrounding the nature of indigenous religion was deployed.

From the outset of colonial contact it must be assumed that European colonizers were operating with very specific ideas of what religion is, that being, in this context, Protestant Christianity. While this underlying assumption more tacitly defined European methods of classifying indigenous religions, i.e., what sort of rituals do these indigenous people display (prayer, general observances toward heavenly bodies), the classification of the indigenous people as “with religion” meant a different type of comparison and classification was employed by Europeans to “better understand” the indigenous people of Southern Africa that was more clearly influenced by the western, Protestant biases of the Europeans.  

While the classification of indigenous people as having religion was neither seamless nor universal, 17 it brought about further comparisons on the part of the Europeans in an effort to better understand the “religion” of the indigenous people in Southern Africa. Central to these comparisons was an effort to understand the indigenous people as fundamentally displaced or disenfranchised from their location in Southern Africa. In other words, at its root, European comparative analysis of religion sought to understand the indigenous populations as related to other “world religions” such as, in the following example, Judaism or Islam, but in a completely “primitive” form.

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16 Chidester (1996), 75. Chidester makes a brief reference to the Protestant ideology that dominated European efforts to classify the practices of the indigenous people, but this observation is worth noting as its presence undoubtedly plays a part in the colonial experience.

17 Chidester (1996), 84-87. It is most appropriate to consider the change from “no religion” to “having religion” as undergoing various stages of proto-religiousness, often in the form of superstitions.
The case of the Zulu people is representative of an interesting example in colonial comparative religion. The Zulu people, having been brought under colonial control were discovered to have a religion, and according to analyses of various European experts, shared many similarities with ancient Israelites.\footnote{Chidester (1996), 124-125.} While the similarities between the Zulu people and those of ancient Israel will not be summarized here, a significant comparison on the part of the Europeans lay in the analogous social histories of the Zulus and Jews. “[T]he crucial factor in this identification of the Zulu as ancient Israelites seemed to lie in the assumption that Jews could be contained, and perhaps even ghettoized, under a system of Christian Rule.”\footnote{Chidester (1996), 125.} Whether or not an overwhelming amount of data convincing even the most skeptical critic that the Zulu are, in fact, displaced Jews, the significance of such a comparison highlights two features worthy of note.

First, the identification of Zulu as Jew (albeit in a primitive form) brought the Zulu from the realm of the unknown to the known. The strange and mysterious ways of this indigenous people are not so foreign to Europeans for they clearly are related to those of ancient Israel.\footnote{Chidester (1996), 125. Chidester goes on to note that the identification dominated-Zulu-Jew stands in interesting opposition to the then-contemporary identification of the Xhosa people as not-dominated-Xhosa-Arab in a comparison potentially betraying “a certain degree of prejudice against Islam and Arabs.”} Chidester notes that G. R. Peppercorne, a magistrate of Pafana and proponent of the ancient Israelite hypothesis, observed that if Europeans were curious about the Zulu religion, they “had only to read the Hebrew Bible.”\footnote{It is important to reiterate that crediting of the Zulu people with a religion, and further association of Zulu practices with ancient Israel occurs only after total domination by colonial forces. The Zulu only have religion, and much more are associated with Jewish religion only \textit{after} being subjugated by colonial rule.}
A second, and perhaps more interesting outcome is resultant in the linking of the Zulu people with the ancient Israelites, raising issues of identity and locality. For Europeans arriving in Southern Africa, it is clear from the beginning that they are in a strange and unfamiliar territory; a territory that is not their own. This genealogical view of the relationship between the Zulu and Jews suggests that these people also do not have their origins in this land, but rather trace their origins to those of ancient Israel. This effort in classification, on the part of the Europeans, assists in identifying the indigenous population as “also outside;” a reality easily incorporated in the mission of colonization. The reality of European presence as alien is complemented by an analogous “reality” that these indigenous people are also alien. Indigenous entitlement to land is no longer an obstacle for the colonial agenda.

2.1. Classification and Comparison

In no way is the aforementioned description of colonialism in Southern Africa complete. The narrative of colonial involvement continues to this day, with many interesting developments worthy of analysis and discussion. If, however, we pause and reflect on the colonial situation until now two key concepts come to the fore as indispensable processes in the enterprise of colonization: classification and comparison.

Whether implicit or explicit, as Jonathan Z. Smith has argued, there can be no classification without some form of comparison. “[C]omparison and classification [are] basic to the human sciences... classification in relation to thought plays a central role in human cultures and, therefore, in religions. Cultures and religions themselves continuously engage in comparison and classification as well as becoming the objects of
our classifications and comparisons.” In encountering new phenomena classification inevitably takes place, and more importantly, this classification always takes place alongside something else. In the case of European colonial interests in Southern Africa, classification of religions (or lack thereof) took place alongside European Protestantisms. Colonialists attempted to understand indigenous systems of belief and practice within this comparative framework.

Implicit in this sort of classification and comparison is the essentialist understanding of religion: the religion of the Europeans, Protestant Christianity, is the archetype for how we understand religions elsewhere. In the process of classification, the perceived normative example of religion is identified as Christianity, while the religions of the indigenous peoples are perceived as irregularities; they are anomalies within the system. In the process, positive poles are established in the colonial context as “us,” and negative poles are identified with “them”; in this way a host of binaries are conjured in this system, not least of which is that of true/false.

While the issue of classification from a binary perspective does illuminate some of the problems inherent in the clash of European colonialism, there are limitations to what this perspective can tell us about the situation on the frontier. Approaching the colonial situation in Southern Africa assuming that Europeans and Africans did not have preconceived notions of the other would be a mistake. Rather, both social bodies had modes of representing the other that had long since been a part of social consciousness:


In the middle ages, the European image of Africa was ambiguous – a mysterious place, but often viewed positively: after all, the Coptic Church was one of the oldest ‘overseas’ Christian communities; black saints appeared in medieval Christian iconography… Gradually, however, this image changed. Africans were declared to be the descendants of Ham, cursed in The Bible to be in perpetuity ‘a servant of servants unto his brethren.’ Identified with Nature, they symbolized ‘the primitive’ in contrast with ‘the civilized world’.24

The representation of Africa and Africans was at work in European (and in this case specifically British) consciousness for a long time, and these representations shaped European consciousness such that we cannot accept colonial encounters to be “first impressions” on otherwise blank slates, but encounters that are feeding into a long history of representation.

The commodity racism of Imperial Britain in Africa is a well-documented phenomenon, and it was through advertising in particular that the imperial efforts of Britain in Africa were validated, “forging a link between Empire and the domestic imagination.”25 It was more than the spread of a Christian gospel that civilizes the “savage” Africans, but the spread of commodities that worked to establish uneven relations between Europe and Africa.26 In particular, the racialization of soap in Africa, and the intense marketing from the imperial center to the peripheries and beyond that suggested soap “had the power to wash black skin white” while keeping “the imperial body clean and pure in the racially polluted contact zones.”27

25 Stuart Hall (1997a), 240.
26 Stuart Hall (1997a), 240.
While these examples of representation may seem diffuse and disjointed from the prospect of classifying indigenous religions on the colonial frontier, we cannot extricate them from colonial consciousness as factors that inform the perspective of the colonizer “on the ground.” They are examples of “meanings” at work in colonial consciousness as the imperial agenda takes hold and moves forward.

From an epistemological standpoint, the classifications and comparisons made set the tone for how we are to understand indigenous presence, along with their systems of belief and practice. Forms of knowledge establish categories, and work at representing indigenous people in the colonial consciousness. Beyond these established epistemologies, however, are the discursive aspects of these classifications that have their own role to play in colonization. It may seem implicit in suggesting that the African skin is black, and thus unclean is a discursive action, but to classify and compare (and in effect, make representations) is not merely to make an epistemological statement about the nature of some given taxon. To classify and compare is to arrange the world into meaningful categories in an active sense:

The vast majority of modules within complex taxonomic structures are likely to derive from the natural world and, insofar as taxonomies are in part epistemological instruments, the claim is advanced that they make possible knowledge of the underlying patterns of the natural order. But insofar as taxonomies are also instruments for the organization of society, those patterns are extended to - better yet, imposed upon - social groupings, as the social module (whether explicit or not) is associated to the modules of the natural world, being treated as if it were but one more instance of a general cosmic law.  

Unpacking this extended passage allows for two key elements in the enterprise of classification to be brought forward: the discursive quality and the process of naturalization. That classifications do more than establish epistemologies by arranging the world into meaningful categories is certainly an aspect we have seen in effect on the African frontier, but the strategy of naturalizing indigenous peoples and their systems of belief and practice is an additional technique associated therein. The naturalization represents an attempt to fix indigenous peoples within a framework that is outside of history. “’Naturalization’ is therefore a representational strategy to fix ‘difference,’ and thus secure it forever. It is an attempt to halt the inevitable ‘slide’ of meaning, to secure discursive or ideological ‘closure.’”

Thus, the discursive aspect of classification for indigenous religions in Africa is given all the more weight by establishing itself as a real and fixed quality of indigenous life.

While the vicissitudes of African indigenous status from “without religion” to “with religion” seem to flow almost without rhyme or reason, it would seem that the uncertainty of these designations undercut the attempt at naturalization on the part of the Europeans. Colonial efforts in familiarizing themselves with the indigenous people carried more baggage than being mere attempts at early anthropology or comparative religion analysis. As Chidester suggests, these studies were validated as “discovering” “truths” about the inhabitants of Southern Africa:

As we have seen, the comparisons and generalizations through which Hottentot religion was invented were worked out on a battlefield. As a result, they remain contestable assertions. They do not provide solid evidence for establishing the truth about Hottentot religion. Rather, they

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29 Stuart Hall (1997a), 245.
demonstrate the fluctuation of comparative maneuvers on a contested frontier. Although Khoikhoi people have certainly had human experiences and expressions that could be designated as religious, their “religion” was thoroughly and completely a European invention, a product that was invented and reinvented by a frontier comparative religion. As powerful (and by no means innocent) inventions, European denials, discoveries, and constructions of Hottentot religion contributed to the dispossession and displacement of Khosian people in the Cape. By denials, European comparativists dismissed any indigenous entitlement to the land. In their discoveries of religion, however, European comparativists did not necessarily affirm Khosian humanity. Instead, they certified the containment of the Hottentots and Bushmen within secured colonial boundaries. Once they were rendered harmless, the Khosian were found to have a religion that could be museumized and preserved in the archive of the comparative history of religions.30

Perhaps one of the most succinct and scathing critiques of European comparative religion in Southern Africa, Chidester brings home the issue of classification of religions among the indigenous people in Southern Africa. Much more than establishing systems of knowledge about indigenous people in a colonial context, classification established systems of knowledge about the indigenous people that facilitated their disenfranchisement from the land they occupy. This disenfranchisement saw not only the removal of indigenous people, but their reintegration in the land after being subjected to European colonization, resulting in a re-presentation of indigenous people from European perspective: hermetically sealed in the European box of colonization, complete with religion.31

2.2. Reactions to Colonization

30 Chidester (1996), 71-72. It is important to note, as Chidester points out in this passage, that epistemologies established by Europeans regarding Hottentot religion did not, and in fact to this day do not, represent truths about Hottentot religion. Rather, they represent categorization of indigenous religions within a European colonial context; they represent European organization of Southern African society, and do not reflect the realities of life in the Cape for the indigenous people.

31 Indigenous African people would be removed, relocated, and then reintegrated to South Africa based on the system of administration determined by the European colonizer.
This is not, however, the end of the story of colonization. It is, in all honesty, only the beginning of half of the story. The reality in the colonial setting is that while the narrative is typically presented from the perspective of the colonizer, the colonized are equally invested in the situation, and while it may not seem to be the case, they are often able to negotiate aspects of their own identity (albeit in restricted capacities) within the colonial situation. This is not to say that indigenous groups do not experience constraints in the colonial situation, but rather that they continue to negotiate their identity even after the imposition of colonial domination.

In the case of indigenous groups in Southern Africa during European colonization, David Chidester draws attention to the efforts of various Christian missionary groups and their attempts to proselytize among the Zulu people. Early on in these mission efforts, it was observed by missionary John Colenso that the Zulu people appeared to have a name for what seemed to be a supreme being; uNkulunkulu. With the subsequent adoption of this name by Colenso and others, the missionary effort moved forward, armed with a vague idea of uNkulunkulu and the problem of translating this conception of a Zulu supreme being into the Christian God.

Unfortunately for those charged with the missionary task, it became apparent that the idea of a Zulu Supreme being (as analogous to the supreme Christian God) was less clear among the Zulu people, and thus the Europeans were charged with the missionary

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32 It should be noted early on that while it may be tempting to consider missionary efforts in Southern Africa as distinct from political-colonial interests, the two are inseparable, and should be considered as intimately connected.

33 Chidester (1996), 129. While the term uNkulunkulu was technically discovered by John Colenso, Chidester notes that a top priority of his was to locate a supreme being in the Zulu religion. Colenso was interested in finding a figure that would be amenable to the Christian conception of God; a useful tool in the conversion of indigenous people to Christianity.
effort to “remind [the Zulu] of the true meaning of their own religious vocabulary.”

European colonialists therefore had much to contend with since names for a Zulu supreme being were not standardized under the uNkulunkulu nomenclature, and more importantly the position of a supreme being in Zulu tradition was not one of primacy; Zulu religious concerns seemed to focus more on the importance of ancestors. The realization of significance of the primacy of ancestors in the Zulu religion was firmly apprehended by Wilhelm Heinrich Bleek, a German Philologist who spent much of his time collecting Zulu oral traditions, concluding that while there was evidence of uNkulunkulu as the “unknown god,” the Zulu religion was one built primarily around the worship and veneration of ancestral spirits.

This observation on the part of Bleek carried implications further than simply providing a stumbling block for Christian missionaries; there were political implications as well:

[The ancestors] were effective as a means for dismissing the presence of Europeans, within the idiom of traditional religion. Bleek wrote that he often asked his Zulu assistant, a conservative religious person, “What are you saying?” Instead of answering, however, the Zulu assistant dismissed Bleek. “I am not speaking to you,” he would say, “I am praising the Amahlozi [ancestors].”

34 Chidester (1996), 134.
36 Chidester (1996), 141-145.
37 Chidester (1996), 145. Bleek also noted that although the function of ancestors in Zulu religion may have found a new purpose in the colonial context, through his comparative philology it certainly represented the oldest form of religion for the people.
Distinctly present in Zulu ancestor worship was their ability to connect with a history that was apart from a European presence; a method of connecting them with a history that had been outside colonial history.

This observation did not, however, stifle attempts at uncovering “the nature” of uNkulunkulu. In further research done by Bleek, it became clear that “hidden” in oral traditions among the Zulu were the remnants of creation narratives. One of these myths was the creation narrative of uNkulunkulu recounting how he created humanity. “According to this myth, uNkulunkulu emerged from beneath the ground to create humans, male and female. But he also created black people and white people. He said, ‘the white men [abe-lunga] may live in the midst of the water, in the sea. The [black] men shall carry spears.’” The myth, as it was uncovered by Bleek serves the purpose of exploring so-called natural orders, the creation of male and female but also suggested something more immediate in its Southern African setting. The myth outlined the “historical oppositions that defined the modern world of Zulu religion in the middle of the nineteenth century. It was structured in terms of the oppositions represented by white and black, sea and land, and the violent confrontation of spears and guns.” Ultimately, Zulu agreement on the nature of the “unknown god” as a supreme being is lacking. “Whatever the term uNkulunkulu might have meant [previous to colonial involvement], the “unknown God” featured most prominently in Zulu efforts to make sense out of the colonial situation.”

38 Chidester (1996), 146.
39 Chidester (1996), 146.
40 Chidester (1996), 146.
It is unclear at this point where one might originally locate uNkulunkulu. Whether this figure represents a once-forgotten supreme being that has become tangled in the arrival of the Europeans, or simply a prime example of colonial influence from European monotheisms, what is clear is that the representation of uNkulunkulu in oral traditions of the Zulu in nineteenth century Southern Africa is intimately connected to the colonial situation, and that the creation of a supreme deity in Zulu tradition is actually a colonial invention.

Straying somewhat from the frontier lands of Southern Africa and the work done by David Chidester, we might gain some clarity from similar situations elsewhere. In an effort to interrogate the history of myth among the Maori of New Zealand, Jonathan Z. Smith sought to investigate a Maori creation myth and its god, Io. Smith’s interest in this myth was stirred by the nineteenth century anthropologist E. B. Tylor and his critiques of indigenous “high gods” as an “explicit response to missionary activities and native theological speculation.” In this case it is not, for Smith, an explicit matter of colonization that his attention has been brought to these matters. Rather, it is a curiosity about the ways in which indigenous beliefs are typically constructed, and the curious anomaly of this “unknown god” in the Maori cosmogony that has caught his attention.

Smith begins his analysis by engaging in a series of investigative maneuvers by locating the earliest extant references to the god Io in scholastic writings. Smith’s inquiries brought him to a text dated from 1907 by W. E. Gudgeon and translated by Hare Hongi, and to a joint exposition of the cult of Io by Elsdon Best and S. Percy Smith

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published in 1913, in which both of these texts share the claim that Io is the supreme
creator deity of the Maori.\textsuperscript{42}

Apart from scattered references to Io from sources dating from the late nineteenth
century, the 1907 text of Gudgeon stands as the earliest reference to Io as the supreme
deity of the Maori. Gudgeon received this information from a Maori native by the name
of Tiwai Paraone, about which little is known.\textsuperscript{43} The 1913 text of Best and Smith
represents the next oldest reference, and stands as an interesting point of reference in this
study due to its independence of Gudgeon’s text. “Smith and Best relied on a single
informant for the bulk of their data. H. Te Whatahoro (J.M. Jury) was a baptized
Christian half-breed [\textit{sic}] who had lived most of his life in European style and whose
skill in the Maori language appears to have been deficient.”\textsuperscript{44}

Closer analysis of the sources for both Gudgeon and Smith and Best reveal that the
sources of their work on the cult of Io can be located on similar timelines in the late
1880s, and that these sources (from which they had received their information on the god
Io) demonstrated efforts on the part of Maori Christians to develop “a native counterpart
to the Christian Bible.”\textsuperscript{45} The most convincing of these suspicions is found in the words
recorded of Best’s informant (likely Whatahoro), where he states, “I think that if your
missionaries had sympathy with our people and had patiently studied the cult of Io

\textsuperscript{42}Smith (1982b), 68, 72. Smith notes that the original document by Gudgeon is no longer available, therefore we are reliant on a fairly credible translation by Hare Hongi, a Maori-British New Zealander whose British name was H. M. Stowell. 68-69

\textsuperscript{43} Smith (1982b), 68.

\textsuperscript{44} Smith (1982b), 72.

\textsuperscript{45} Smith (1982b), 79-80.
instead of despising and condemning our belief, that the cult [of Io] would have been incorporated into your Bible.”

With the writing already on the wall, Jonathan Z. Smith proceeds to critique the historical milieu that surrounds the source materials of the cult of Io. While detailed exposition of the history of colonization in New Zealand is beyond the scope of this analysis, Smith notes that “the context [here] is the period and the region of the Maori Wars, a complex set of political and religious rebellions against colonial authority which began in the 1840s, intensified during the decade 1860-1870, and ended (with some exceptions) in Maori defeat by 1880.” In short, the context appears to be one of intense Maori-Christian tensions in a colonial situation. This context, as well as the apparent European connections among the Maori sources, offers an socio-historical location for the myth of Io that affirms Smith’s suspicion that the 1907 Io cosmogony is not representative of some primordial creation myth. “It is certainly not ‘neolithic,’ it is not ‘the Polynesian creation myth,’ and it cannot be used as evidence for Urmonotheismus or for the nature of archaic ritual, as has been done in previous scholarship. But it is a genuine, perhaps even an eloquent, expression of a more recent form of Maori religion...”

While it can certainly be said that these two examples share much in common, it is clear that they represent the findings of two scholars with different goals in mind. In the case of David Chidester, his research into the unknown god led him to critique the

46 Smith (1982b), 80.
47 Smith (1982b), 81.
colonial missionary agenda. It became clear that the monotheistic nature of European
colonialism sought to convert indigenous populations of Southern Africa by porting
indigenous religious beliefs to “colonial compatible” systems; a task most easily
accomplished by establishing a supreme deity in indigenous traditions that would be
amenable to the Christian God. Fortunately for colonial missionaries and the colonial
mission in general, the presence of such a deity was found in the Zulu religion, however
vaguely this figure existed in the history of the Zulu religion.

For Smith, his interest on the unknown god of the Maori in New Zealand was
sparked both by the assertion of E. B. Tylor that “high gods” in indigenous traditions are
most often native responses to missionary activities and their direct influence on
indigenous groups, along with the early scholarship on the Maori that suggested the
presence of an archaic, supreme being named “Io.” These two details in turn led Smith to
investigate the scholarship that supported the claim of a supreme deity in the Maori
cosmogony, resulting in a criticism of early twentieth-century scholarship and the sources
used. In his investigations Smith found that the sources these scholars used were
themselves firmly embedded in the colonial context in New Zealand. In short, the
scholars’ search for an archaic, supreme Maori deity was informed by western scholars
and indigenous sources whose context was thoroughly colonial, and whose interests were
embedded in European-Maori relations and the Christian mission.

Differences aside, these two examples do present an interesting element when
considering the prospect of colonization and religion. As per earlier discussions regarding
the classification and comparison of indigenous religions in the colonial setting, it was
more or less assumed that full agency was held on the part of the colonizer, in this case European colonialism. This assumption led to critiques of the ways in which taxonomies were deployed in the colonial setting to produce epistemologies about indigenous groups. Moreover, these taxonomical efforts were also a driving force in establishing colonial presence. In other words, classification of indigenous populations as “without religion” and later on as “alien groups from elsewhere” served in establishing an agenda for colonial expansion, an integral part of the colonial mission.

However, concluding a critique of colonialism, however brief, in such a vein is shortsighted to say the least. While boundaries are drawn and classifications are made on the part of the colonizer, the colonized are not passive receptacles of colonial ideology. There remains a space for negotiation and creativity on the part of the colonized. In the case of the unknown god in Southern Africa, European colonial missionaries sought to find an analogous representation of the Christian god that would be compatible to the colonial setting. In that process, what they found were indigenous representations of supernatural beings that were not as easily amenable to the colonial cause, and in some cases they found religious representations in the form of ancestor worship, suggesting a resistance to colonial authority. In colonial New Zealand it seemed that the supreme Maori deity that was found early in the nineteenth century was actually the product of Maori-European politics; an effort on the part of Maori converts to develop a cosmology more in line with European Christianity. In both cases the indigenous populations maintain their linguistic subjectivity while actively engaging the colonial situation.

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49 For the South African indigenous people, appealing to the ancestors in a colonial context meant appealing to a history apart from European colonial influence.
These are just two examples of how colonization need not be perceived as a situation of total domination. The colonial environment, while often a site of disparate power dynamics, is nonetheless a location where the identities of both the colonizer and the colonized are being worked out in the field of play. It is with attention to this field of play, and ways in which power dynamics are negotiated on the colonial frontier that our focus will now turn.

2.3. Abandoning the Vector: Colonialism and the Field of Play

The colonial situation cannot be described as purely dialectical in its nature. It cannot be conceived of merely as a relationship between hermetically sealed “cultures,” that come into contact with one another on the colonial frontier. Acknowledging the complexity of the colonial situation means recognizing “the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp of these often opposed political spheres.”\(^50\) Homi Bhabha’s words draw out details that may be frustrating to admit: that the colonial context is less simple than one may prefer. The idea of a unidirectional relationship between colonizer and colonized, or even a dialectical relationship where colonizer and colonized interact in the colonial frontier is reassuring in its simplicity. Imagining a simple vector where one can point to the place where identities begin and end, and where homologous cultures engage in the colonial frontier is to present a situation easily intelligible. Striving for intelligibility, at the cost of over-simplification and outright misrepresentation is to perform fiction rather than academic work. Engaging the colonial

situation means looking at the complex relationships, boundaries, identities, and other factors that are at work in the colonial field of play.

In his book, *Islands of History*, Marshall Sahlins offers analysis of three distinct South Pacific indigenous groups (Fiji, New Zealand, and Hawaii) in an effort to engage the colonial situation directly, seeking to understand the unique ways in which the histories of indigenous groups intersected with European colonialism. In particular, Sahlins chose to take a close look at the figure of Captain Cook, and specifically look at the relationship between Cook and the Hawaiians (really, between Europeans and Hawaiians) that had such an auspicious beginning, but ultimately concluded in his death at Hawaiian hands.

From the arrival of Cook and his crew, the apparent ascension to divine-like status and the subsequent death of Cook at the hands of the Hawaiian chief, Sahlins proceeds to engage the critical point of intersection between the two cultures. Through rigorous anthropological and historical investigation, Sahlins demonstrates that the arrival of Cook was interpreted by the Hawaiians as the arrival of the god Lono, an integral part of the ceremony of Makahiki, the festival of the New Year, and the death of Cook a mere few weeks later can be “described as the ritual sequel: the historical metaphor of a mythical reality.” Sahlins argues that it was the cultural lens available to the Hawaiians that allowed them to make sense of Cook’s initial arrival as the arrival of Lono, and subsequently, make sense of the inexplicable return of Cook/Lono as a disruption in the

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cosmological fabric, a disruption that could only be rectified through the ritual slaying of Cook/Lono.\textsuperscript{52}

While Sahlins description and argument that demonstrates how Captain Cook fit [nearly] perfectly into the Hawaiian cosmological narrative is a fascinating and compelling argument,\textsuperscript{53} it is not precisely where our interest falls in the colonial situation. Rather, it is in the more nuanced understanding of what occurred specifically within the Hawaiian social structure at the intersection of their history and the Europeans. The Hawaiian social body was not seen as a homologous, self-contained unit prior to, at the point of, and even beyond contact with the Europeans. Instead, Sahlins takes rigorous note of how the collision of cultures on the colonial frontier had enormous effect within Hawaiian social structure.

One such encounter took place upon the return of Cook and his crew, their final return as it happens, and the obvious tensions within Hawaiian society. “The King, who came in next day, was furious with the priests for again letting the British use the ground near Hikiau temple. The priests reciprocated with a cordial detestation of the chiefs at Ka’awaloa, an attitude they did not trouble to conceal from their British friends.”\textsuperscript{54} From the very beginning, reactions to the European visitors varied among the indigenous people, since individual interests and experiences varied so vastly within the social body

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{52} Sahlins (1985), 128. Sahlins goes on to note that the reappearance of Cook and his crew was interpreted as an issue of sovereignty: Cook’s return after having already left was a direct affront to the recent triumph of the king, and thus, the only possible interpretation the Hawaiians could have of Cook’s second return was one of colonization – they returned to settle the land.

\textsuperscript{53} The “perfection” of Cook’s insertion into the Hawaiian cosmology should not be interpreted as coincidental in any capacity, but rather should be seen, through the presentation of Sahlins, as an incident that required (in the imagination of the Hawaiian people) the evaluation of historical circumstances with the tools (mythologies) available to the Hawaiian people.

\textsuperscript{54} Sahlins (1985), 127.
\end{footnotesize}
of Hawaiians. “In their different ways, the commoners and chiefs responded to the divine strangers according to their own customary self-conceptions and interests. Encompassing the extraordinary event in traditional cultural forms they would thus recreate the received distinctions of Hawaiian status.”

For Sahlins, it was not the fact of the incorporation of Cook and his crew into their worldview, first through mythology, and then into their history (a complicated point of transfer hindered by western conceptions of history and mythology), but rather, the impact that such an intersection of cultures had on Hawaiian culture. This intersection was a catalyzing factor in the Hawaiian social body, such that “cultural categories acquire new functional values. Burdened with the world, the cultural meanings are thus altered. It follows that the relationships between categories change. The structure is transformed.”

In this way the collision of cultures on the colonial frontier might be meaningfully thought of as an interaction between colonizer and colonized, but within the colonized culture, the dynamics of the social body are also shifting.

In the decades following Cook’s fatal visit, Hawaiian chiefs and commoners, men and women, ritual tabus and material goods, were all engaged in practical exchange with Europeans in ways that altered their customary meanings and relationships… The dominant structure of the initial situation, that the chiefs distinguished themselves from their own people in the manner that Europeans were different from Hawaiians in general, became a conceit of personal identity—from which ensued an order of political economy.”


57 Sahlins (1985), 140.
This fundamental change within Hawaiian society captured Sahlins’ interest; the idea that, in the colonial situation, changes are affected not simply between cultures in a dialectical relationship, but within social groups. The complexity of colonization is encapsulated in the collision of social bodies on the frontier, but also within these social bodies. The relationship between classes and even individuals is affected since none are representative of the whole; no one person or group acts as the sensory receptor for the whole of society, therefore the experiences vary and the effects of the colonial encounter differ. Relationships are altered, and the code of social relations changes. This is a point Sahlins makes abundantly clear in the final two chapters of his book. Apart from the fascinating series of events surrounding Captain Cook, the arrival of the Europeans was met with a revaluation of the concept of tabu in Hawaiian society.

Originally meant to distinguish the relationships between people on the grounds of purity versus impurity, post-European encounters saw a revaluation of the concept of tabu where Hawaiian chiefs could regulate the trade of European goods. Not simply restricted to the alterations of purity relations, the changes brought to Hawaiian society through the revaluation of tabu meant a fundamental restructuring of relationships between men and women, chiefs and commoners, and a host of other social codes that needed to be reinterpreted in light of these new developments. What ensued was “a true structural transformation, a pragmatic redefinition of the categories that [altered] the relationships between them.”

58 Sahlins (1985), 8, 142.
59 Sahlins (1985), 143.
60 Sahlins (1985), 143.
Sahlins is not simply restricted in the revaluation of the political economy of Hawaiian society. More to the effect, he stresses the effects of European involvement in Hawaiian affairs beyond the collision of social bodies. He draws attention to the ways in which these interactions have cause a revaluation of social relationships at their most fundamental level—that of tabus—and illustrates how the involvement of European trade brought about a general restructuring of social relationships, primarily through the introduction of class-based distinctions associated with the introduction of western commerce.61

2.4. Conclusions

The guidance of Marshall Sahlins’ analysis of Hawaiian culture at the critical point of intersection with European colonialism is invaluable as one approaches the issue of colonialism. Sahlins demonstrates, in the most concise fashion, that the colonial situation is never one of homologous entities clashing on the colonial frontier in a battle comprised of wholly united fronts. Instead, he illustrates the permeability of social bodies, and remains firmly committed to the idea that colonial contact need not mean the same thing for every part of a given social body. Instead, individuals and subgroups each experience the contact in unique ways, often producing in unpredictable outcomes. It is under the rubric of Sahlins that approaches to the colonial situation must be governed—this is the challenge of the postcolonial; to engage the colonial situation not as a vector or dialectic of discourse, but as a field of play, where the effects of colonial influence are experienced in varying and often disproportionate ways. Social bodies involved in the colonial

61 Sahlins (1985), 143.
situation must be thought of as belonging to “a liminal signifying space that [is] internally marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogenous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference.”

\textsuperscript{62} Bhabha (1994), 212.
3. Postcolonialism and Performance: Discipline, Structures, and Genre

It is that insofar as the academic discourse of history—that is, “history” as a discourse produced at the institutional site of the university—is concerned, “Europe” remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call “Indian,” “Chinese,” “Kenyan,” and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called “the history of Europe.”

-- Dipesh Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe (27)

3.1. Introduction

If the context of colonialism has been sufficiently described, the prospect for how we are to go about studying the complex territory of those caught up in the colonial field of play remains uncharted territory. While the present study has made a distinction between colonialism and postcolonialism via the division of chapters two and three, the division is, in many ways, arbitrary and superficial. In no way should this suggest that these two areas are wholly separate. If the work of Jonathan Z. Smith, David Chidester, and Marshall Sahlins are often collected under the banner of history of religions, comparative religion, or anthropology, the content of each of their work suggests that critical point of intersection between cultures is of primary importance. Whether the content is South African indigenous peoples, Melanesian cargo cults, or tales of Captain Cook masquerading as the god Lono, these scholars are utterly preoccupied with postcolonial concerns. It is therefore pertinent that if we are to employ a postcolonial framework in analyzing Revelation we must therefore outline in the most explicit terms the contours of this theoretical framework.

3.2. Postcolonialism: contours of the episteme
Postcolonialism as a discipline seeks to take into account the complex relationships between subjects while taking into account the often disproportionate forms of cultural representation amid the contest for social and political power.\textsuperscript{63} In its most basic sense, postcolonialism seeks to take into account the complex relationship of culture, race, and nationality in situations of social and political domination, as Apollo Amoko notes, “[p]ostcoloniality traces the history of the institutions specifically designed to organized and promote the study of cultures…”\textsuperscript{64} One of the many impetuses for postcolonial studies came about in the English department specifically to “challenge the ethnocentric foundations of English literature.”\textsuperscript{65} It is precisely this context of colonialism that postcolonial studies seeks to address. For postcolonial studies the context of colonial influence has gone unaddressed and paradigms and parameters for reading global culture in the wake of imperial domination are a necessary step in cultural studies, literary or otherwise.\textsuperscript{66}

The push for a consideration of once presumed “authentic representations of English literature” was brought about in large part by Edward Said through his books \textit{Orientalism} and \textit{Culture and Imperialism} which have sought to re-evaluate the so-called canonical texts and paradigms of English (and fundamentally Western) literature.\textsuperscript{67}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{amoko2} Amoko (2006), 132. Amoko refers here to Gauri Viswanathan’s \textit{Masks of Conquest} (1989) where Viswanathan contends that English literature has its origins not in Imperial England, but in colonial India. This is evidenced most notably by the first appearances of English literature not in the imperial “motherland,” but in India; in the context of colonialism. 133.
\bibitem{amoko3} Amoko (2006), 134.
\bibitem{amoko4} Amoko (2006), 133.
\end{thebibliography}
idea within this paradigm shift is that general theories of “english literature” ought to include a wide array of the English postcolonial world, as Amoko notes “African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Countries and Sri Lanka” all have their place and stake in a re-evaluation and redefinition of English literature.

Frantz Fanon has also been signalled as an important figure in the early stages of postcolonialism. His work in Algeria, particularly in the liberation movement therein prompted subsequent books such as *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) which have had a significant impact on postcolonial studies, particularly in the areas of anti-colonialism and decolonization. Fanon’s contributions to postcolonialism come to us through his psychiatric training and his meditations on the condition of the black man in relationship to white society. For Fanon, “[t]he black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man.”

Central to postcolonial thought is the idea that there is no centre to speak of. Whether we are discussing the institutions and apparatuses of colonization, or the colonized or colonizer, none of these terms can be grounded as a stable entity that we might address; there is no fixed position. Amoko relates postcolonial thought closely with poststructural theories that are resistant to “metanarratives” or “narratives of

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68 “english” with a purposeful lower case “e.”

69 Amoko (2006), 134.


71 Frantz Fanon (1967), *Black Skin, White Masks* (translated by Charles Lam Markmann, Grove Press), 17.
legitimation” as suggested by Jean-François Lyotard.\textsuperscript{72} Instead, postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha have located the postcolonial subject as a radically de-centered, hybrid and fluid individual, and it is in this radically de-centered subjected that we can perceive the lack of centre.\textsuperscript{73}

Central to the ideas of poststructuralism, globalization maintains the ideas of a lack of fixity, the lack of a defining centre:

Globalization refers to the emergence of a world economy characterized, among other things, by the recent phenomenon of mass migration, increasingly rapid telecommunication, and the rapid flow of both capital and economic goods across national boundaries.\textsuperscript{74}

These are, for Bhabha, the circumstances in which the postcolonial subject now finds him/her “self”: “[t]he mobile, hybrid, and fluid postcolonial subject [being] the global subject par excellence.”\textsuperscript{75} Indeed, the very idea of a postcolonial figure is elusive in Bhabha’s description; the postcolonial “subject,” it seems, “comes into view” through the intersections of cultures in the field of play. In some ways it is a mistake to casually refer to the postcolonial “subject” as such since the designation “subject” seems to suggest that this is an actual person. Instead, the postcolonial subject represents a category, a conceptual designation that is useful in describing the intersection of social and political forces in the field of play.


\textsuperscript{73} Amoko (2006), 135. While Bhabha’s poststructural ideas of “the radically de-centered individual” are built upon metanarratives of empire and nation he contests the authority of these terms, seeing a more complex relationship than simply “the margin and the center” at play in globalization. (135-6)

\textsuperscript{74} Amoko (2006), 136.

\textsuperscript{75} Amoko (2006), 137.
3.3. Postcolonialism as discipline

While postcolonial thought emerged from many distinct areas of study, the subsequent development into the much broader context of cultural criticism has seen postcolonial studies gain a prominent role in academia. Postcolonial thought has obtained a significant foothold in various academic fields, generating “canonical authors and courses, systems of coherence, rules for evidence, and protocols for readings as well as a growing army of faculty, graduate and undergraduate students,” not least of these are the works of Gayatri Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said and many others.76 However these gains have come at a painful realization, according to Amoko, for while postcolonial studies has carved out a place in the academy, the original intention of postcolonial studies being a critique on existing fields of study, such as English literature, have been foregone and postcolonial studies instead exists within its own arena as another “field of study” within the expanding repertoire of the postsecondary institution. In Amoko’s view “[i]nnovation…was welcomed precisely because it did not entail change in other fields.”77 To put it simply, postcolonial studies has been afforded a place at the table so long as it does not interfere with the other guests.

The terrain of postcolonial studies ought not be oversimplified either, as Stephen Slemon has argues in his essay “The Scramble for Post-Colonialism.” For Slemon postcolonial studies represents a heterogeneous mixture of issues not limited to nativist longing in post-independence national groupings; as a cultural marker of non-residency for a Third World intellectual cadre; as the

76 Amoko (2006), 137.
inevitable underside of a fractured and ambivalent discourse of colonialist power [and] as an oppositional form of “reading practice.”\(^\text{78}\)

Slemon wants to open up the definition of postcolonialism, seeing applications beyond colonial domination. For Slemon, postcolonialism represents an analytic cognizance of the disproportionate forces of representation that are at work in many places.\(^\text{79}\)

The diversity of issues requesting the attention of postcolonial studies is a vast array of interdisciplinary concerns that seems to have exploded from its origins of challenging colonial domination. If casting the enormous net over postcolonial studies as the expansive heterogeneous mixture of the aforementioned is daunting, Slemon contends that the bigger issue lies in identifying the actual nature of colonialism. For Slemon, colonialism is not simply embedded in the economic and/or political structure of domination imposed by colonial forces. Rather, in addition to these it must include the ideological and discursive formations—“the ways in which colonialism is viewed as an apparatus for constituting subject positions through the field of representation.”\(^\text{80}\)

Anne McClintock argues that a major driving force in imperial progress can be traced to the development of photography in the nineteenth century. The proliferation of Western technology that represented reality “as it was,” was a foremost vehicle for reproducing the exotic spectacle.\(^\text{81}\) Slemon identifies three active agents in a process he

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79 Slemon (1994), 16.

80 Slemon (1994), 17.

refers to as the subordination of the colonized through the manufacturing of consent.\textsuperscript{82}

The power exercised in colonial discourse runs along three different vectors: brute force or direct political influence, ideological apparatuses\textsuperscript{83} and ideological influences in the field of semiotics.\textsuperscript{84} The concept of brute force is most easily understood as police or military bodies. For Slemon and others this is the most obvious representation of the power of the colonizer over the colonized. It is an explicit manifestation of the power of one over the other. The situation becomes less clear when one considers the ideological apparatuses such as education and other ideological institutions, and is obscured even more as he explores the ideological influences of the semiotic field, which Slemon elaborates on to include things such as advertising, sculpture, maps and even pornography.\textsuperscript{85} Through the field of semiotics, representations are established as normative, effectively becoming the dominant form of a given exemplum, and relegating all other representations to a subordinate status. The example of photography is thus a prime example. Photography would come to serve as one of the primary avenues of imperial progress, as McClintock writes:

\begin{quote}
The photographic studio...was itself a contradictory space, inhabiting as it did the thresholds of private and public, artisan and industry, commerce and art, domesticity and empire. The photographic studio, in the labor of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{82} Slemon (1994), 17.

\textsuperscript{83} Slemon is referring to the control that colonialists have over the professional fields of knowledge within various apparatuses

\textsuperscript{84} Slemon (1994), 17-19. See Bruce Lincoln (1989) on force and discourse in \textit{Discourse and the Construction of Society} as well as Louis Althusser's \textit{Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses} (1970). Slemon takes Lincoln's idea of discourse a further step by suggesting a division in terms of ideology in state apparatuses and ideology in the semiotic field. For Slemon this is a crucial division between formal institutional representations in state apparatuses, and more “informal” modes through artistic representations.

\textsuperscript{85} Slemon (1994), 19.
rendering these distinctions natural and technically reproducing them for mass consumption, simultaneously displayed them as extravagant artifice, invention, and theater...[in this way p]hotography was both a technology of representation and a technology of power.\textsuperscript{86}

As Slemon, McClintock, and others have shown, the field of semiotics opens up the colonial encounter to the much broader framework of representation. The forms of representation in a given context are often determined by the dominant segment of society, as McClintock has suggested with the advent of photography, postcolonialism must address these complex issues of representation, an issue that will be explored further in chapter four.\textsuperscript{87}

3.4. Postcolonialism and poststructuralism: affinities and disparities

The aim of postcolonial studies becomes, in part, to expose “the making, operation, and effects of colonialist ideology” in an effort to better understand how these elements deployed by the colonizer affect the colonized.\textsuperscript{88} It is worth stating at this point that there is much shared between postcolonialism and poststructuralism. Benita Parry suggests that the “structures” poststructuralism sees itself as beyond are the same structures that postcolonialism is also beyond: structures such as the colonial apparatus or “imperial machine” are deconstructed; the idea of totality in this sense is abandoned as efforts in deconstructing situations of colonialism take shape.\textsuperscript{89} Initial approaches to the

\textsuperscript{86} McClintock (1995), 125-126.


\textsuperscript{89} Parry (2004), 78. In this section Parry draws significantly from Robert Young’s (2001) Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction in an effort to describe the tenuous relationship between poststructuralism and Marxism and their relationship to postcolonialism.
critique of colonizer and colonized in postcolonialism suggest that the situation of imperial knowledge was fundamentally knowable; that the history of both the colonizer and colonized was given.\textsuperscript{90} Poststructuralism troubled this idea of an initial, knowable past for the colonial subject. Postcolonialism was able to challenge “traditional theories of representation imprisoned in unquestioned theories of history as a progressive narrative, subjects as transcendental and unified, and forms of representation tied to realism and a consensual moral community.”\textsuperscript{91}

At the same time, however, the desire to take a poststructural approach to postcolonial studies presents obvious issues. While poststructural thought resists acknowledging the structures involved for both the colonizer and colonized (a central theme in Bhabha’s description of the “mobile, hybrid and decentred postcolonial subject”), postcolonial studies necessarily addresses these socio-political structures in its analysis of the colonizer/colonized relationship. The concerns of postcolonial studies are therefore inextricably Marxist concerns: issues of imperialism, class struggles, combined and uneven development being only a few.\textsuperscript{92} The solution, as it appears to Parry, is not to be found in continually vying for theoretical footholds in postcolonial studies, but in a realization that the theoretical sophistication achieved in the field must be applied to the structures encountered today.\textsuperscript{93} According to Parry

\begin{itemize}
  \item[92] Parry (2004), 79.
  \item[93] Parry’s comment stands in starkest contrast to Bhabha’s position in its Marxist perspective on postcolonialism. While Bhabha’s relentless commitment to “sketching” the postcolonial context provides an interesting and insightful take on the interstitial nature of the postcolonial context, his mode of presentation is seems to prohibit the practical application of postcolonial ideas on the academic “frontier.”
\end{itemize}
only then will it be possible to examine the state apparatus, economic organization, social relationships, and cultural forms of different post-independence regimes and to understand that the “globalized” world order is structured such that the centers of economic, political, and cultural power remain entrenched in a small number of capitalist nation-states. The task facing postcolonial studies today is not, of course, to abandon the theoretical sophistication that has marked its engagement with Orientalist discourse, Eurocentrism, and the exegetics of representation, but to link such metacritical speculations with studies of actually existing political, economic, and cultural conditions, past and present. 94

Parry argues for the theoretical sophistication of postcolonialism that acknowledges the complexity that those such as Bhabha advocate, while at the same time making use of the epistemological apparatuses for the purposes of addressing phenomena as they are encountered in lived human experiences. The theoretical conscience of people like Bhabha should guide postcolonial critiques that are committed to addressing the experiences of social and political domination.

3.4. Postcolonialism(s)

Despite the varied forms of postcolonialism there remains a tendency to view postcolonial studies through a Eurocentric lens. 95 Thus, there is a need to establish a multivalent conception of postcolonial studies that understands the theoretical position as more than an expression and application of the European (post)colonial situation. Acknowledging the diverse forms of postcolonialism that stem from areas like Latin America, Africa, Asia, and North America to name only a few. Anne McClintock argues that

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95 This is a view expressed succinctly in Dipesh Chakrabarty’s Provincializing Europe, where Chakrabarty argues against the European formation of history. “The British conquered and represented the diversity of Indian pasts through a homogenizing narrative of transition from a medieval period to modernity.” Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000), Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference (Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford), 32.
Just as the singular category “Woman” has been discredited as a bogus universal for feminism, incapable of distinguishing between the varied histories and imbalances in power among women, so the singular category “post-colonial” may license too readily a panoptic tendency to view the globe within generic abstractions voided of political nuance.  

Indeed, as has often times seems to be the case, the application of the suffix “ism” implies a shared group of ideas; a homogenous collection falling under a singular ideology that is “postcolonialism.” For McClintock, the issue stems from the very term postcolonial:

Most problematically, the historical rupture suggested by the preposition “post-” belies both the continuities and discontinuities of power that have shaped the legacies of the formal European and British colonial empires (not to mention the Islamic, Japanese, Chinese and other imperial powers). Political differences between cultures are thereby subordinated to their temporal distance from European colonialism.

What is worth considering, and what is at the core of McClintock’s argument is the question of whether the multitude of geopolitical bodies that have some stake as postcolonial “subjects” can actually be coined as such. In similar fashion, McClintock’s concerns for the term “postcolonial” are akin to those of Robert Young and Benita Parry. The same adaptability that Parry argued for with regard to the theoretical composition of...
postcolonialism in order that postcolonial discourse might address existing social, economic and political narratives found throughout the globe is found in McClintock’s argument, with the added factor that postcolonial or neocolonial cannot be a blanket term.

While some postcolonial studies may have grown out of the experiences of Imperial England, as a discipline its influence has reached (and continues to reach) far beyond this. Since its diverse beginnings, postcolonial discourse has developed a complex theoretical basis that has allowed it to address a variety of social issues. The “postcolonial” need not refer simply to those who exist in a time “after colonialism”; it is a theoretical position that allows room for conceptualizing the colonized both during and after colonization. The relevance of a postcolonial approach in studies of antiquity are legitimated since the “post” is in effect a reference to the discourse itself; postcolonialism is an occasion for thought about the field of representation in the colonial context, and provides insights and a more complex mode of conceiving of the relationships that exist between different segments of social bodies. The fact that postcolonialism emerged as a framework in the latter half of the 20th century often leads individuals to locate its application to the same temporal context, which is a fundamental misunderstanding of both the nomenclature (“post” as being “after”) as well as nature of the theoretical position that acknowledges the imbalance of cultural representation in the colonial context.

Having sketched the landscape of postcolonialism, our attention will now be turned to the open space in the colonial context. In particular, attention will be given to the idea of performance, considering the idea performativity, and how performance
contributes to the colonial field of play, and might be considered within a postcolonial critique.

3.6. Performativity: of words and narrative

There seems to be a difference between saying a thing and doing a thing, and yet there seems to be validity in the idea that saying something is at the same time an act as well. Judith Butler argues that words do constitute actions themselves; that calling someone a name is a creative act, and that while it is not an act that fixes the thing named in a stable and consistent place, it is an act that gives one “a certain possibility for social existence.” This “bringing into being” that Butler discusses is not meant to be understood in a particularly literal way, but rather through the process of interpellation; the subject is at one time “pre-ideological,” and in the process of being named is brought into ideology and given an existence in a context. “To understand this, one must imagine an impossible scene, that of a body that has not yet been given social definition, a body that is, strictly speaking, not accessible to us, that nevertheless becomes accessible on the occasion of an address, a call, an interpellation that does not “discover” this body, but constitutes it fundamentally.” In this situation words do not physically create the body, but rather bring it within a frame of reference, or within a given ideology, that it might be relatable to other things. It is in this context, for Butler, that words have the capacity to take action, to actively bring subjects into a given context and make them socially recognizable.


101 Butler (1997), 5. Butler characterizes this as the “Althusserian reversal of Hegel,” that in addressing the being is brought into “the circuit of recognition.”
Building on the work of J. L. Austin, Butler describes two types of speech acts that produce effects: illocutionary and perlocutionary. Illocutionary acts are speech acts that, in a sense, perform as actions in the moment of their utterance.\textsuperscript{102} A judge pronouncing a sentence for a criminal is a prime example. Butler argues that the sentencing of the criminal is not an intention; it is itself a “kind of doing.”\textsuperscript{103} Contrasted against illocutionary acts, perlocutionary acts are those that, in their utterance, have the capacity to bring about actions in a more indirect fashion.\textsuperscript{104} “Implicit in this distinction is the notion that illocutionary speech acts produce effects without any lapse of time, that the saying is itself the doing, and that they are one another simultaneously.”\textsuperscript{105}

That words actually do something when they name is not the end of the discussion. For Butler, there is the added problem that words seem to be able to do something when operating within a particular context. Specifically, it is the ability of words to harm that piques Butler’s interest. Speaking particularly of threats, Butler argues that while “the threat is not quite the act that it portends, it is still an act, a speech act, one that not only announces the act to come, but registers a certain force in language, a force that both presages and inaugurates a subsequent force.”\textsuperscript{106} However, as Butler continues, words in the form of threats have expiration dates fixed to them, and the failure of a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{102} Butler (1997), 17.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Butler (1997), 17.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Butler (1997), 17.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Butler (1997), 17.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Butler (1997), 9.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
threat to “deliver the goods” can bring its efficacy into question and open itself up to counter threats and ultimately diminishing its effect.\textsuperscript{107}

There is also a matter of authority that needs to be added to this equation. Certainly, the speakers of these utterances gain efficacy for their words based on their position as speakers. Certain social markers identify individuals and institutions that allow them to lay claim to an audience’s attention.\textsuperscript{108} For example, the legal institution and its history constitute a considerable part of what authorizes a judge when he or she makes a pronouncement. There must be, in addition to the authority of a speaker, a consideration of the autonomy of the words themselves and the authority that they hold. Since it has been suggested that words have the power to act in themselves, it is important to acknowledge that certain words, indeed certain discourses, have their own authority. This authority, Butler argues, is found in the history of associations with a given utterance. “The power to ‘race’ and, indeed, the power to gender, precede the ‘one’ who speaks such a power, and yet the one who speaks nevertheless appears to have that power.”\textsuperscript{109} This brings about a gray area: in the case of a racial slur, the person who utters the slur initially appears to be the one exercising the power of the word. The efficacy of the term as injurious speech is however, according to Butler, determined not by this single occurrence, but by the long legacy involved in the use of the slur. Every individual who has been the target of a racial slur has not endured the injury of this speech simply by the

\textsuperscript{107} Butler (1997), 11-12.


\textsuperscript{109} Butler (1997), 49.
single utterance directed at them, but by the long history of this injurious speech and the people affected by it.

It is important to remember, however, that speech acts, as Butler has termed them, are never entirely fixed in their meanings. The fact that words and terms can be re-appropriated and redeployed to different ends is evidence of the lack of fixity. “The revaluation of terms such as ‘queer’ suggest that speech can be ‘returned’ to its speaker in a different form, that it can be cited against its originary purposes, and perform a reversal of effects.”

Consider, for a moment, the idea of a stereotype. A key feature in the act of stereotyping [among many others] is the closing off and exclusion of characteristics that do not fit the desired representation of a given phenomenon. Stereotyping “divides the normal and the acceptable from the abnormal and the unacceptable. It then excludes or expels everything which does not fit, which is different.” This process of division and expulsion in order to categorize everything that does or does not belong is a continuous process in stereotyping. It is a continuous discursive effort to naturalize and fix difference. The fact that it is a continuous discursive effort is, in turn, the most telling piece of evidence that suggests meaning is not fixed, but something that is always shifting:

[U]ltimately, meaning begins to slip and slide; it begins to drift, or be wrenched, or inflected into new directions. New meanings are grafted on to old ones. Words and images carry connotations over which no one has

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110 Butler (1997), 14.

111 Hall (1997a), 258.

112 Hall (1997a), 258.
complete control, and these marginal or submerged meanings come to the surface, allowing different meanings to be constructed, different things to be shown and said.\textsuperscript{113}

Stereotyping is therefore an effort to stop the slippage of meaning by continually reinforcing categories. It is a process of binding the imagined communities\textsuperscript{114} of “us” and “them” that is never fully complete, never actually realized; it is a continuous effort to reinforced imagined communities and constructed categories.\textsuperscript{115}

Beyond the scope of words as actions is also the idea that a narrative can be active; that a narrative structure can, in and of itself, engage in an active performance to some particular end. That texts or narratives can be seen as performances is clear by Deborah Kapchan who describes performances as “aesthetic practices – patterns of behavior, ways of speaking, manners of bodily comportment – whose repetitions situate actors in time and space, structuring individual and group entities.”\textsuperscript{116} Increased studies of performance have sought to embed the analysis of a given performance in terms of its context, that is, the environment from which a performance comes and the context to which it is directed.\textsuperscript{117} This change in analysis saw a “turning away” from analyses that saw linguistic models and abstract structures as the keys to analyzing a performance.\textsuperscript{118} Instead, it became a matter of looking at the socio-historical milieu. Performances are

\begin{footnotes}
\item[113] Hall (1997a), 270.
\item[115] Hall (1997a), 258.
\item[117] Kapchan (1995), 480.
\item[118] Kapchan (1995), 480.
\end{footnotes}
thus defined by the context they emerge from, and the context in which they are
performed; these are the frameworks that give performances meaning. “As framed events
(with a beginning, middle, and end), performances materialize and are recognized within
generic bounds. Thus political oratory is distinguishable from a sales spiel if only because
each references a different genealogy, employing the rhetorical strategies, formulae,
citations, and symbols conventionally appropriate to one form or the other.”119 Kapchan
stresses that the efficacy, indeed even the intelligibility of a given performance is
governed by the context (or genre) of the performance. The genre is a “social contract on
the level of both form and content.”120

This is not to say that a performance cannot challenge the normative structures of
the genre in which it is performing, “indeed, performance genres may be in deliberate and
flagrant breach of generic convention, mixing frames and blurring boundaries so that
tradition and authority are put into question and redefined.”121 Victor Turner also
recognizes this aspect of performance when he notes that “the performance is often a
critique, direct or veiled, of the social life it grows out of, an evaluation (with lively
possibilities of rejection) of the way society handles history.”122 Context provides a frame
of reference to a given performance, but there is no telling what the aim of the
performance will be. Turner also stresses the ritual aspect as a significant component of

119 Kapchan (1995), 482.
120 Kapchan (1995), 482.
121 Kapchan (1995), 482.
performance. Preferring to describe it more broadly as “cultural performance,” for Turner, these performances rest on

[performative reflexivity[, a condition in which a sociocultural group, or its most perceptive members acting representatively, turn, bend or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other sociocultural components which make up their public “selves.”]123

Thus performance is deeply embedded in the social realm, with a wide variety of elements that have their role in describing and informing the performance.

Considering the performance of narrative, Bridget Chalk engaged a reading of D. H. Lawrence’s book, *Aaron’s Rod*. For Chalk, this work represents a particular view that Lawrence held with regard to contemporary constructions of the nation and self. Beginning her analysis Chalk notes that initial reception of the novel was quite poor, with critics often citing the disjointed narrative and failure of the text to progress along the same lines as is typically expected of novels during that time. The spotty reputation of *Aaron’s Rod* “stems primarily from this failure to sustain an organizational structure, as well as from the protagonist’s opacity and dearth of consistent emotional interiority.”124

The “organizational structure” and protagonist’s “opacity and dearth of consistent emotional interiority” suggest that the criticism of *Aaron’s Rod* stems from generic expectations and the disappointment of a novel that failed to correspond to the standardized form.

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The many reviews that cite Lawrence’s failure to reproduce conventional structure and organization of his novel as anything but a deliberate effort seem to be, as Chalk notes, ignorant of Lawrence’s extensive knowledge of the novel and its form. Given previous writings such as “Art and Mortality,” “The Future of the Novel,” and “Mortality and the Novel,” Lawrence is far from ignorant about conventional forms of the novel, and moreover seems to be quite contemplative not only on the current state of it and social implications therein, but also on the future prospects of the genre.\textsuperscript{125} The traditional development of the novel sees a protagonist’s adventures propel him or her “toward a stable position in the social order.”\textsuperscript{126} In \textit{Aaron’s Rod} there is a revision of the \textit{bildungsroman}, or “coming of age story,” that sees the protagonist reject the current social order in favor of a more indeterminate position.\textsuperscript{127}

Instead of indifference to the structure and organization of the genre of novel, Chalk argues that there is a deliberate method to Lawrence’s approach. According to Chalk, deeply upset and concerned about the recent developments of the passport system in England, Lawrence was outspoken in his frustrations with the state and their efforts to implement a standardized form of identification. For Lawrence, the passport system appeared to be an effort to pin down individual identity through the form of a standardized system of identification. “Like the slumbering British lion, Lawrence describes bureaucracy as a malodorous force poisoning him internally…\textsuperscript{128}his letters suggest the ways in which Lawrence conceived of his body as directly affected by the

\textsuperscript{125} Chalk (2008), 57.
\textsuperscript{126} Chalk (2008), 61.
\textsuperscript{127} Chalk (2008), 61.
documentary regulations of the British government.”128 The advent of the passport system served to level and homologize citizens while Lawrence thought “relation to one’s country of origin should not construct and constrict the individual, but merely serve as one among many past connections.”129

By locating the Lawrence and his frustrations with state-regulated forms of identification imposed primarily (but not merely restricted to) the passport system, Chalk sees patterns of Lawrence’s aversion and antipathy toward such institutions depicted through the narrative of Aaron’s Rod. “The novel’s attention to processes of categorization and homogenization further [demonstrate] its dialogue with contemporary problems of identity construction.”130 For Chalk, this aversion to the basic design of the novel can be seen in the narrative development of the novel.

Aaron Sisson, a coal miner, walks out on his wife and two daughters under the auspices of purchasing last minute Christmas decorations, never to return save once, to retrieve his flute, or “rod” of the title…The rest of the novel consists of Aaron drifting from place to place and from crowd to crowd, forming temporary attachments with other characters who do not resurface or shape the plot in any lasting way. The attention to circulation and related tropes of travel and transit suggest an alternative to a teleological narrative world and fixed social identity…The beginning resembles an end, the middle does not perform any connective function, and the end merely trails off in mid-conversation in a chapter with a title suggesting disintegration and dissemination: “Words.”131

It is this constant movement, and “lack of abiding relationships” that seems to be the bedrock of the narrative, even surmising the abandonment of his wife and family as an

128 Chalk (2008), 56.
129 Chalk (2008), 57.
130 Chalk (2008), 57.
131 Chalk (2008), 58.
attempt to have room around himself; “to loosen himself” from his fixed social identity.  

Despite the inherent problems in Lawrence’s conception of the phenomenological “self,” the performance of his narrative seems to be quite clear. Chalk adequately demonstrates the connection between contemporary British affairs as they pertain to the implementation of a passport system with D. H. Lawrence’s novel *Aaron’s Rod*, effectively signaling the novel as a performance of Lawrence.

The initial critiques that denounced Lawrence’s novel set the stage for the argument of genre. As proclaimed by his peers, Lawrence’s text was critiqued as a poor example of *bildungsroman*, citing the degenerative narrative as their primary charge against Lawrence. The critiques received do, however, situate Lawrence as a performer within a particular genre, that of the novel. The social contract that governs genre is reinforced in this process. Since, as Kapchan has suggested, genres are “permeated with the ‘sediment’ of the past,” the critiques leveled against Lawrence are evidence of an established, normative form of the novel and are thus wary of performances like those of *Aaron’s Rod* that call into question these structures that do not comply with the normative system. If Lawrence’s refusal to reproduce conventional novel structure earned him the critiques of his peers, it does not, however, signal the failure of *Aaron’s Rod* as a performance. “Performance…not only fabricates meanings in highly condensed symbols

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132 Chalk (2008), 59-60.

133 Throughout her essay, Bridget Chalk pours over Lawrence’s lamentations about the loss/obstruction of the self through the implementation of the passport system, as Lawrence bemoans such systems that “fix” one’s social position. Lawrence laments further that “true relationships” cannot be mediated by social structures (such as the passport system) that work to define and “impose” brutal classifications, claiming that all living things abide in their own ways, and that nothing is fixed. For Lawrence everything moves and changes *except* for the self, a position I find quite untenable.
but comments on those meanings, interpreting them for the larger community and often
critiquing and subverting them as well.”\textsuperscript{134} Lawrence’s performance of Aaron’s Rod
serves as evidence of a corrosive discourse wherein Lawrence proposed an alternative
version of the \textit{bildungsroman} that questioned former conceptions, and in a sense
deconstructed them.\textsuperscript{135} In this sense, narrative as performance is exceptionally clear.
Through this medium Lawrence made use of characters, plot lines, and the narrative
structure in general to communicate this performance. In the end, \textit{Aaron’s Rod} served as a
commentary on the form of the novel, and, if we are to take the words of Chalk seriously,
as a critique of the passport system in Britain.

\textbf{3.7. Performance and postcolonial}

It is not difficult to situate the idea of performance in the postcolonial. D. H.
Lawrence’s novel carries colonial overtones in its critique of the imposition of
government regulated forms of identification, more specifically the hegemonic authority
exercised in determining what comprises the individual. For Lawrence it was a matter of
state domination and subjugation over the individual, and while an analysis of \textit{Aaron’s Rod}
certainly would not be considered “postcolonial,” there remains relevance for
understanding the significance of performance in a postcolonial context.

Insofar as postcolonial criticism seeks to bear “witness to the unequal and uneven
forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social order,” we

\textsuperscript{134} Kapchan (1995), 480.

might return, if only briefly, to Marshall Sahlins’ discussion of Captain Cook amongst the Hawaiians.\textsuperscript{136}

While Sahlins makes a compelling case for the complex composition of social bodies on the colonial frontier, the episode of Captain Cook’s encounter with the Hawaiian people is also a strong example of the role of performance in the colonial context. From the arrival of Cook to his subsequent death at the hands of the Hawaiians, performance played an integral role. Upon Cook’s arrival, Sahlins notes that “[a] priest came on board and wrapped Captain Cook in the red tapa-cloth decoration of a temple image, then made the offering of a sacrificial pig.”\textsuperscript{137} From there, the priest took Cook up to the temple of Hikiau, all the while the herald calling out, “O Lono,” as they progressed on their path.\textsuperscript{138}

In light of the episode of Cook amongst the Hawaiians, it is clear that performance is a highly communicative medium. For the Hawaiian people, the arrival of Cook is understood through the performance of the priest with Cook, the covering of Cook with the red tapa-cloth, leading him to the temple, and the herald proclaiming Cook to be Lono. In fact, Cook’s entire interaction with the Hawaiians, from start to finish, is, according to Sahlins, understood best by understanding the cultural tools available to the people at the time. If we refer to Victor Turner’s description of performance, and specifically performative reflexivity, it is clear how the sociocultural group of Hawaiians reflect on the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social

\begin{footnotes}
\item[136] Bhabha (1994), 245.
\item[137] Sahlins (1985), 105.
\item[138] Sahlins (1985), 105.
\end{footnotes}
structures, ethical and legal rules in an effort to make sense of Cook and his arrival. Many of these elements find their manifestation in the episode of Cook as Lono, and they find their articulation in the words, actions, and behaviors of the players involved.

The performative quality of the death of Cook is apparent in Sahlins admittance that his death was an “absolutely unique event” that “took place every year.” Thus the actions of the Hawaiians are intelligible within the context of Hawaiian culture. If Deborah Kapchan is correct in asserting that performance is meaningful insofar as it pertains to a genre, the Hawaiians making use of the meanings, codes, roles etc. known to them is a strong example of the performance that welcomed, and ultimately killed, Cook. These performances were engaged using the cultural resources available to the Hawaiians, and serve as a compelling example of the role of performance in the colonial context.

3.8. Conclusions

While the level of theoretical sophistication brought about by scholars like Bhabha and others certainly gives dimension and provides a depth of understanding to the way in which both colonizer and colonized inform each other in the colonial situation, the ability of such positions to be readily applied to social contexts can be troublesome. Despite the high level of theoretical development, scholars like Benita Parry are justified in coaxing postcolonial theory away from the sophistication of poststructural thinking and maintaining its orientation toward the social, political, economic and cultural structures that are encountered on a daily basis.

Adopting a postcolonial approach to a text like Revelation is a daunting endeavor, one that presents itself with more obstacles than suspected. If the colonial field of play and postcolonial framework suggested in the last two chapters have given any indication, studying the relationship between Roman Imperialism and Revelation in a first century context is a daunting task. Such an approach will attempt to understand not only the relationship between the homogenous entities of Rome and Revelation, but at its very core it will question the histories of people involved in the colonial context, and how identities are constructed both in and through the colonial context.

Often we over simplify the social and historical contexts for texts like Revelation, forgetting that the colonial environment from which it emerges contains many responses to foreign domination. These critical issues reside at the very heart of postcolonial criticism, which aims to analyze and discuss the heterogeneous histories of peoples contending with antagonistic authorities.

We cannot, however, conclude the difficulties of such an approach with the aforementioned paragraph alone, for lurking below the concerns of heterogeneous histories of people in a first century context is the greater problem of History with a capital “H,” particularly for texts like Revelation. In the quote that began this chapter, Dipesh Chakrabarty described the problem of history being primarily a product of European thought; the consequences for such a position, according to Chakrabarty, are significant.

“History” as a knowledge system is firmly embedded in institutional practices that invoke the nation-state at every step—witness the organization and politics of teaching, recruitment, promotions, and publication in history departments, politics that survive the occasional brave
and heroic attempts by individual historians to liberate “history” from the metanarrative of the nation state.140

While Chakrabarty’s comments may appear to belong solely to the much larger concerns of history in general, there is a general message worth heeding for the history of religions as well, and even more specifically for studies in Judaism and Christianity. The invocation of the nation state, or Eurocentrism, described by Chakrabarty retains considerable strength in the study of religion, particularly in the privileging of Judaism and Christianity as the data sets par excellence.

Jonathan Z. Smith has developed a fine example of such privileging in his comparison of early Christianities with religions of Late Antiquity, finding that such comparisons privileged the Christian narrative over the peripheral religious movements of Late Antiquity.141 Written more than 20 years ago, Smith called the comparison of early Christianities with religions of Late Antiquity “an affair of mythic conception and ritual practice” that has served to reinforce ideas of Christianity as an a priori tradition, effectively legitimating it over and against the other less genuine religions of antiquity.

The concerns of Smith and Chakrabarty, though expressed in different areas, are virtually identical. History and the study of religion are beholden to the colonial frameworks that skewed the playing field from the outset. In the case of Revelation, contending with the colonial discourses means not simply being mindful of the clash of


cultural entities with the text, but also being mindful of the history of scholarship that inevitably is the milieu out of which we, as students of religion, must emerge.

Smith and Chakrabarty’s concern is not one that can be rectified by a few deft movements of a pen, or by simply acknowledging the imbalance of representation in the histories of religion. Rectification of these issues is a long road that begins with the acknowledgment, but more importantly continues with the engagement of discourses that are cognizant of and seek to rectify those imbalances. For Chakrabarty, this was the task of his book *Provincializing Europe*; “to write over the given and privileged narratives”; indeed, to attempt to speak over the din of previous scholarship that happily described the peripheral as it comfortably rotated around the center.\(^{142}\)

With such an agenda on the table, our next is one of description. If we genuinely seek to understand Revelation as a first century writing, placing it in the category of the known, then a description of the social, historical, and political landscape from which it emerged is of utmost importance. In doing so it is not the aim of this next chapter to develop a comparison that presents Revelation as unique; it is, in fact, the exact opposite. The aim is to describe provincial territories that came under Roman rule and consider the implications of such a change for a variety of peoples who now found themselves under Roman rule. From this vantage it is not the peripheral that will provide the backdrop for our “special” Christian data, but the peripheral that will inform and elucidate John’s revelation. It is toward this project of description that our attention must turn.

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\(^{142}\) Chakrabarty (2000), 46.
4. “And you shall have Dominion over all the Earth”:
Roman Imperialism and Provincial Cults

Culture must be shared for it can have any meaning at all, and the fact that it is shared makes it a powerful medium for communication, but what is shared is a set of associations or conventions, not rules, and individuals are free to conform, ignore, or even change those conventions.

-- Greg Woolf, Becoming Roman (12)

4.1 Introduction: the Hellenistic topography and cosmogony

When speaking of “religions of antiquity” one is obliged to elaborate a more specific time frame. Such a phrase is rife with ambiguity and we might just as well speak of religion a long, long time ago. Yet we continue to engage in researching religions of antiquity tacitly conceding that we understand what we are discussing as “ancient,” and that seems to supply enough information to our intended audience to allow us to move along. However, if we remain, for only a moment, and dwell on the question of what we mean when we say “religions of antiquity” we can clarify for our own didactic purposes what “religions of antiquity” means for our course of study and how we might separate such an understanding from contemporary conceptions of religion and bring greater clarity to this area of research.

Bruce Lincoln offers a helpful description for ancient, and in particular religion in antiquity when he describes antiquity as a “situation in which religion is not one system of culture coexisting among many others, but occupies the central position and plays a unique role—informing, inflecting, integrating, stabilizing, even at times controlling and determining all others.”143 This description stands in stark contrast with contemporary

understandings of “religion” and “religious.” Lincoln offers a conception of religion in antiquity that stands in contrast to contemporary understandings that see religious discourse as a separate entity:

To say that nothing in antiquity was free of religion—not war, disease, erotic love, science, the arts, poetry, or the state, not the landscape, the family, the meat on the table, or the fire on the hearth—is to say not that everything “was” religious, only that religious concerns were a part of all else, and a part that remains—to us, at least—analytically recognizable.

This characterization of religion in antiquity provides important insights as we turn our attention to religion in the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial age, an age extending from the late fourth century BCE to the emergence of a Christian world in the fourth century CE. Burton Mack’s introductory chapter of Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth “Clashing Cultures” is aptly titled as he offers here a characterization of the clashing of cultures in the Eastern Mediterranean area during the Hellenistic age. For Mack, this period is best understood as “helter-skelter cosmopolitan age” where people who found themselves under the cultural and political influence of Alexander’s Empire struggled to find new ways to understand themselves since the social structures and traditions once known to them were no longer the singular source of socialization in the ancient Mediterranean. For Mack, it was the introduction of Hellenization under the expansive rule of Alexander that “shuffled the deck” for the inhabitants of the Ancient Mediterranean; people who were once part of independent

144 This statement rests more on an understanding of religion in a contemporary North American setting.
kingdoms found themselves paddocked in the new cosmopolitan environment known as the Hellenistic Age.

We are accustomed to thinking of Alexander as the enlightened ruler who introduced the peoples of the ancient Near East to the glories of Greek culture and so created the Hellenistic age, where we locate the foundation of Western civilization. We do not usually consider the negative effects of his campaigns which brought to an end the last of the illustrious empires of the ancient Near East, especially those of the Persians and the Egyptians, and tarnished the classical Greek ideal of the *polis* by using its model for imperialistic purposes.¹⁴⁸

For Mack, the decline and eventual disintegration of the temple-state system, the Greek *polis*, and the Roman republic signalled an important advent in the Hellenistic age; it was a time when conventional social structures that anchored individuals and groups in their social bodies disappeared, and the task of establishing social consciousness in a new imperial situation was at hand. The dissolution of the temple-state meant the decay of a system of social organization built around notions of power and purity.¹⁴⁹ The king, who was sovereign over his subjects, was the center of power in this system, while the priest presided over the temple and represented purity.¹⁵⁰ The arrival of Alexander complicated this structure, and while some groups¹⁵¹ modelled on the temple-state structure attempted to reconcile foreign kingship with the temple-state system, it became clear that this system would not endure in the imperial age.

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¹⁵¹ Mack traces the Jewish trajectory of foreign domination that circumvented the problem of kingship by suggesting that the high priest of the temple could represent sovereignty for the people and was successful in doing so for a time. However, the destruction of the temple in 70 CE marked the end of the temple-state model for the Jews. 22-23.
The problems that plagued the Greek *polis* were not entirely unlike those that hindered the temple-state system. While the Greek city-state was planted throughout the empire, engendering cities that represented the ideals of the polis, ideas such as freedom, citizenship and autonomy were not as easily transplanted.\(^{152}\) The founding of new imperial cities near older native cities throughout the empire in an attempt to supplant native cities was a common practice.\(^{153}\) Additionally, citizenship and the rule of these cities by “kings from afar” undermined the principles of the polis and its democratic ideals.\(^{154}\)

The problem for the Roman republic might be summarised with more brevity for relatively simple reasons. When its military prowess extended beyond the scope of its administrative capacities it no longer possessed the resources to adequately manage such an enormous holding. Mack notes that, “the old aristocracy at Rome with its senate and republican traditions could not control the new distribution of power required to govern such a vast empire.”\(^{155}\)

While the new internationalism occurring in the empire contained expanding political and cultural spheres, there were also cosmological changes occurring to the cosmic structure under the influence of figures like Claudius Ptolemy.\(^{156}\) Martin notes the changes occurring in the Hellenistic age, which transitioned from a classical tripartite understanding of the universe (the heavens, earth and the underworld) to the Ptolemaic

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\(^{154}\) Mack (1995), 24-25.


\(^{156}\) Martin (1987), 6.
model, a view that extended the classical model “to a distant realm of fixed stars that embraced seven differentiated planetary spheres surrounding the earth.”¹⁵⁷ There was now a sharp distinction between terrestrial (sublunar) space and the celestial (superlunar) space above.¹⁵⁸ “This new architecture of the cosmos, together with the new international political topography, defined the hierarchical and horizontal framework of a Hellenistic world system and structured the religious forms distinctive to it.”¹⁵⁹

This new understanding of the cosmos is intimately tied to the new internationalism that was occurring in the empire. For Martin, the once localized deities (such as Egyptian and Syrian deities) found themselves welcomed into the new international area code of the Hellenistic world, and with this transition came changes to their roles as they were introduced to the new conception of the cosmos:¹⁶⁰

As these deities gradually became participants in the Hellenistic world, they were simultaneously severed from their original roles and meanings. Increasingly, the different deities became understood as aspects of a common Hellenistic religious system rather than expressions of historically discrete traditions.¹⁶¹

Martin’s assertion that deities (and by extension the local traditions associated with them) were severed from their original roots is a critical point of interest in understanding the transition occurring in the Hellenistic age. To use an idiom of Jonathan

¹⁶¹ Martin (1987), 10. The following idea finds fuller expression below in J. Z. Smith’s essay “Here, There, and Anywhere” where Smith argues that such a transition from local religious practices such as religions of “here” and “there” find a reassertion of the new cosmological in religions of “anywhere” (religions of anywhere comprise part of that new cosmological makeup).
Z. Smith, traditions that were once religions of “here” or “there,” have lost the sense of what or where “here” and “there” were.\textsuperscript{162} For Smith, religions of both “here” and “there” are contrasted against religions of “anywhere” primarily by virtue of their association with specific loci. While religions of “here” are sometimes ambiguous in their sacred space (a space that is not defined by “there”), they are “concerned with the endurance of the family as a social and biological entity, as a community, as well as with the relations of that community to its wider social and natural environs.”\textsuperscript{163} In these traditions there is a strong sense of kinship and continuity with familial connections both then and now. The religions of “there,” on the other hand, have direct associations with specific locales. Smith describes these religions as “the dominant deities and their attendant mythologies and liturgies [with] the impressive constructions associated with temple, court, and public sphere.”\textsuperscript{164} This is, of course, an oversimplification of a complex process of “ancient-globalization” in the ancient Mediterranean; religious of “here” and “there” persist to varying degrees.

Religions of anywhere, however, occupy a distinctly different position. Religions of anywhere occupy (in a vacuous sense) nowhere in particular.\textsuperscript{165} For Smith, religions of “anywhere”

may be understood primarily as replacements of the religion of “here” in modes appropriate to the new world order. They do so, at least in part, by adapting elements more characteristic of the religions of “there.”


\textsuperscript{163} Smith (2004b), 325-326.

\textsuperscript{164} Smith (2004b), 328

\textsuperscript{165} Smith (2004b), 330.
Responding to the experience of dislocation, they provide a new, predominantly urban, social location. Some were formed first as immigrant societies, initially retaining strong bonds to homeplace. Others associate around divine figures, gods and goddesses, usually, but not exclusively, of the sort more characteristic of the civic and state religions of “there.” 166

While Smith may overreach in his suggestion that religions of “anywhere” offer a complete replacement of religions of “here” and “there,” the roles of kin groups and rituals of initiation once common in religions of “here” and “there” find new expression in the implementation of fictive kin groups and rituals of initiation in religions of “anywhere.” 167 This reinterpretation and re-association is a necessary step given what Smith and Martin have both acknowledged as a new world order. In the case of the Hellenistic age this is precisely what has happened.

These brief descriptions of the changes taking place in the ancient Mediterranean offer a short description of the changes occurring in the geopolitical landscape with the onset of the Roman empire. As we turn our attention to the next section, we will take a few moments to offer a description of the Roman Empire, looking at the expanse of its power and influence in an attempt to take into account, if only in passing, how an expansive ruling body managed to exercise influence over such vast territory.

4.2. It was that it was: Roman Imperialism

The question of why the Roman Empire fell certainly has a romantic feel to it, and while there are many works both popular and academic devoted to this question, a more meritorious question to ask might be how the empire managed to amass such influence

166 Smith (2004b), 332-333.

167 Smith (2004b), 333. Specifically I am thinking of the continual significance of burial practices and rural locations that continue to be relevant in terms of specific places and localities. In short, I don’t think that there has been a complete “replacement.”
for the duration that it did. At the height of its influence the Roman Empire had anywhere from fifty to sixty million people under its rule; considering the fact that this Empire endured well into late Antiquity, the question of how Rome managed to secure its place in the ancient world is certainly a provocative one.\textsuperscript{168}

The cultural unity experienced in the Roman Empire that combined to give a sense of “Roman identity” is a significant factor in exploring the workings of the “Roman machine.” Martin Goodman notes that

Roman towns in Britain looked much like those in Italy or Africa and not greatly different from those in Syria or Egypt. Among the rich elite who paid for and commissioned the designs of public architecture, there developed a high degree of cultural consensus, such that a provincial aristocrat from one corner of the empire would have a great deal of cultural common ground with his counterpart in the furthest reaches of Rome’s domains. Such cultural agreement was of high value in cementing the political co-operation of the upper classes in the government of the empire.\textsuperscript{169}

The evidence of shared types of architecture indicates a shared sense in style, and this is a characteristic of the Empire that confirms a shared sense of culture throughout the Empire. Goodman goes on to note that the “cultural unity was manifested not only in architecture and feats of engineering, such as aqueducts, but in sculpture and painting and to a rather lesser extent in literary culture.”\textsuperscript{170} The evidence of such continuities throughout the Empire must not be shrugged off as some coincidence or even as some peripheral symptom of imperialism. Rather, it should be earmarked as a quintessential feature of the establishment of imperial ideology in the Empire.


\textsuperscript{169} Goodman (1997), 149.

\textsuperscript{170} Goodman (1997), 149.
In his 2000 monograph Clifford Ando argues that the success of the Roman Empire can be understood by the way Roman imperial ideology was manufactured and disseminated. Essentially, Ando argued that while military prowess was certainly responsible for the initial expanse of the Empire, the longevity can only be understood insofar as the rule of the Empire was understood as legitimate by its governed subjects. “A regime’s ideology makes explicit the particular principles of legitimation to which it appeals, and to the extent that the regime is successful the ideology gives voice to the foundational beliefs on which an individual subject’s normative commitment to the social order is based.”171 The manufacturing of such consent and the establishment of one’s ideology cannot be achieved by brute force alone. Stephen Slemon has argued that the success of any colonizing force must take into account both “direct political influence” as well as the ideological influence that operates both in institutional apparatuses (such as education, religious, and various other institutional offices) as well as the field of semiotics (areas such as literary works, advertising, sculpture, maps etc.).172

In terms of what might be associated with institutional apparatuses of ideology, Ando refers to the production and dissemination of official documentation on the part of the Roman government. According to Ando, the Roman government relied on smaller towns and villages to produce and distribute copies of official documentation to surrounding areas.173 Despite having local municipalities shoulder the distribution of documentation, it was policy on the part of the Roman government to ensure that the

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contents of the documents would be made known by requiring that published materials be legible, and that “all such texts be recited at least once at the time of their posting.”\textsuperscript{174} The implications of this aspect of Roman bureaucracy ought not be understated since “it was largely thanks to the Roman government that the vast majority of the population of the Mediterranean world received information about their world an order of magnitude greater in quantity and quality than it ever had before, or would again before the dawn of the modern era.”\textsuperscript{175}

In terms of semiotics, Ando argues that examples of this can be seen with the production and dissemination of images of the emperors throughout the empire. Not to be understood solely by images of the emperors on coins, the portraits of emperors that adorned the gates of various palaces in different cities are an attestation to the production and proliferation of imperial images throughout the empire.\textsuperscript{176} Moreover the “iconographic language was more immediately intelligible to more people than was Latin or Greek.”\textsuperscript{177} In terms of portraits, Constantine stands as a shining example of this system of semiotics at work. As an emperor, Constantine supervised his image as it was manufactured, and in turn authorized its dissemination throughout the empire in sculptures, coinage, and even in less permanent forms such as paintings.\textsuperscript{178}

Two features of this production stand out as noteworthy: first, that Constantine supervised the reproduction and proliferation of his images suggests that the quality of

\textsuperscript{174} Ando (2000), 101.
\textsuperscript{175} Ando (2000), 120.
\textsuperscript{176} Ando (2000), 228.
\textsuperscript{177} Ando (2000), 212.
\textsuperscript{178} Ando (2000), 228-229.
likeness was of paramount importance. In antiquity, as Ando has suggested, it was an enormous feat to have widely produced accurate representations of a person and to have these likenesses share such continuity from Britannia all the way to Antioch. Second, the dissemination from the cosmic center of Rome certifies these items as having value so that:

Residents of the Roman Empire—that is, users of Roman coins and viewers of Roman art—understood that these objects acquired their value not from their raw material but from their origin. That is to say, the legitimacy of the ruler of the world cloaked his portrait and its vehicles with some of his power...[and b]y acknowledging the efficacy of these artefacts...provincials tacitly assented to the legitimacy of the system that selected their emperor and to his right to exercise power throughout his realm.179

The representational power of iconographic images of emperors should not be overlooked. The suggested authenticity of Roman art, particularly images of the emperor, performs a dual function in its representation. First, that these images come from Rome to the outlying areas is suggestive of their authenticity; the proliferation and consistency in representation of Roman rule credits these signs as “real” and “true.” Secondly, the publication and distribution of these images allows the individuals in these images to “give their testimony” to the onlookers. In a very real way, the dissemination of Roman iconography to provincial territories was a way for the imperial office, even the emperors themselves to address their subjects.180 The role and function of works of art is more subtle and pervasive than one may initially suspect. Already alluded to by Ando, Bruce Lincoln also suggests that

…every work of art creates an aesthetic and moral universe that resembles and interacts with those created by other works in the same tradition or canon. Individually and collectively, they invite would-be readers, viewers and listeners into the spaces of the imagination they create. Those audiences who accept such invitations and experience the moral and aesthetic universe of these works as meaningful, comfortable and familiar are not just influenced or transformed by the content of the works at the level of their individual personhood, but they also join in a community.\textsuperscript{181}

In this way the iconic representations of Roman rule in provincial territories might not be best thought of as art decorating Rome’s provinces, but as an active discourse of Rome interacting with its subjects, inviting them into the Roman world as the very idea of Rome as a cultural system is performed for the imperial subjects.

The previously mentioned examples taken from Ando’s work are but a brief excerpt from his monumental investigation of Roman Imperial ideology, and while this brief exposure in no way does justice to his work, it begins to shed light on just how the Roman Empire found success in establishing its authority and legitimacy amongst its provincial counterparts. While the leadership of Rome was established through military conquest, and ultimately was ensured through its military prowess, Ando made great strides in illuminating a less romantic aspect of imperial domination. The enduring success of the Roman Empire was achieved through various channels of ideological influence, where inhabitants of the Empire understood the reigning forces of government as legitimate both through institutional apparatuses as well as through signs and symbols of the authenticity of the Empire. The production and dissemination of Roman bureaucratic niceties along with the production and distribution of images of the emperor

are just two examples of how the Roman government communicated with its subjects and established its rule as real and present.

This does not, however, mean that every group under the Roman Empire internalized the ideology propagated by the Romans, and assented to subjugation. Responses to the Roman Empire on the part of provincial territories vary, and while not every group displayed overt resistance to the regime, some did exactly that. In the following section we will look at how the previously mentioned situation of Roman imperialism shaped responses from native cults under imperial rule.

4.3. Provincial cults in the Roman Empire

A look at provincial cults in the Roman Empire is first and foremost a selective process. In collecting data for review, one must necessarily begin by narrowing items for discussion such as looking at native revolts in the Roman Empire. The fact that the Romans expanded much of their empire by force immediately signals the question of revolt on the part of the conquered, and while there has been significant work in this area, it only acknowledges in absentia the fact that Roman imperial ideologies were successful in creating an environment of perceived legitimate rule, thus not eliciting revolt in a great many instances. Furthermore, as Stephen Dyson has made clear in his essay “Native Revolts in the Roman Empire” the origins of these revolts were not rooted in the initial conquest of the natives by the Romans. “Usually the native tribes do not realize the full impact of the conquest and are more concerned with previous quarrels with other natives.”

Dyson elaborates on this point by suggesting that in later years new

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generations of natives who have not grown up with the intertribal issues of the former
generations are more predisposed to view the conquering forces with hostility.\textsuperscript{183}
Dyson’s observations suggest that an initial reading of Roman involvement with native
cults that seeks to present the immediate clashing of two cultural entities is an
oversimplification of the process of colonization. What is needed, as Dyson has
suggested, is a more nuanced approach that takes into account intertribal relations \textit{in}
\textit{addition to} the advent of Roman Imperialism. The postcolonial approach to studying
native cults in the Roman Empire is an approach that must concede the fact that social
relations can never be simply rendered; for Dyson, the idea that native cults in the Roman
Empire were involved in a peaceful, symbiotic relationship prior to Roman involvement
is an absurd prospect that betrays an inherent bias on the part of the historian. If we are
genuinely interested in studying the impact of Roman Imperialism on provincial
territories they we will have to begin such studies with the caveat that the geopolitical
landscapes in question were not \textit{a priori} utopias waiting to be brought into the imperial
fold.

Furthermore, the revolts in the Empire do not offer a picture of what was
occurring on a much broader spectrum: acculturation. The case of the Batavians and the
ideological adjustments to incorporate Hercules into Batavian identity attest to this.

\textbf{4.4. Roman Batavia}

In his essay on the Batavian identity and the links with the cult of Hercules, Nico
Roymans argues that “communities conquered by Rome…forge a link to Graeco-Roman

\textsuperscript{183} Dyson (1971), 269. Dyson cites specifically the rebellion of Vercingetorix that was comprised primarily
of younger nobles.
mythology in the context of their political relationship with Rome.”

Royman’s argument rests essentially on two key points: first, the Batavians sought to incorporate Roman mythologies as a way to understand themselves within the imperial cosmos as it now existed. Second, the integration of these mythologies can also be read as a negotiation tactic amongst the Batavians as a way to gain favour with the new imperial order. “By creatively adapting foundation myths and genealogies, they sought to negotiate for themselves a worthy place in the Roman world. Myths were a declaration of political loyalty to the new regime.”

More specifically, the integration of Germanic tribes to imperial Rome saw local societies being drawn into a much more complex imperial world. “Romans were more differentiated from one another in terms of wealth, occupation, experience and status than were Gauls who mostly lived in locally circumscribed societies ruled by warrior and religious elites and were mostly full-time agriculturalists.”

Roymans argues that this syncretic activity of incorporating Roman mythologies into native traditions serves a double function by both enabling “a new kinship bond with Rome, while at the same time preserving their local identity.” The integrative function of the Hercules myth should not be viewed exclusively as the “cultural fulcrum” on which the Batavians integrated with the Romans; in the first century CE the Batavian

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185 Roymans (2009), 221.


188 Roymans (2009), 223.
aristocracy enjoyed Roman citizenship, and the establishment of these temples would have been one way they emphasized and laid claim to Roman identity.\textsuperscript{189}

The cult of Hercules Magusanus based in Germania Inferior is perhaps one of the best pieces of evidence for the syncretism of the Roman god since he is given two names: the Roman name “Hercules,” and the Germanic name “Magusanus,” a local hero/deity of the Batavian region.\textsuperscript{190} Throughout Germania Inferior various votive inscriptions to Hercules Magusanus can be found along the southern bank of the Rhine suggesting that Hercules Magusanus may have represented “the principal deity of the civitas of the Batavians.”\textsuperscript{191} Beyond various votive inscriptions scattered along the Rhine are the Gallo-Roman temples of Kessel, Elst, and Empel where recent archaeological evidence has discovered that each of these cult places contained military equipment, while the sites of Empel and Elst also contained figurines of Hercules, along with votive inscriptions to the Roman god.\textsuperscript{192}

For Roymans, the incorporation of Hercules into Batavian mythologies is appropriate since it is contiguous with Roman myths of Hercules’ exploits in the Barbarian north:

Hercules is the prime example of an adventurer who constantly traverses the frontier, he comes face to face with barbaric hostile forces in a wild and inhospitable natural environment. He is credited with being the first explorer

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{189} Roymans (2009), 231.
  \item\textsuperscript{190} Roymans (2009), 227.
  \item\textsuperscript{191} Roymans (2009), 222, 227.
  \item\textsuperscript{192} Roymans (2009), 227-228. Roymans notes that while there do not appear to be votive inscriptions or figurines of Hercules at Kessel, there is reason to suspect association of the cult place with Hercules due to the strong military association of the cult place along with the inscription traditions around the location.
\end{itemize}
and civiliser of the barbarian regions, initially in Spain and Africa, and later in Gaul and Germania.\textsuperscript{193}

Furthermore, the cult of Hercules Magusanus demonstrates strong continuities with the Roman Hercules: he is often clad in lion’s skin while wielding a club, suggesting that while Hercules Magusanus certainly represented local identities, he was simultaneously intelligible as a Roman Hercules.\textsuperscript{194} Tacitus even makes a reference to the connection with Hercules when he notes that: “The Germans, like many other peoples, are said to have been visited by Hercules, and they sing of him as the foremost of all heroes when they are about to engage in battle” (\textit{Germania} 3). Tacitus refers to this association later when he talks of exploring in the northern regions: “We have even ventured upon the Northern Ocean itself, and rumour has it that there are Pillars of Hercules in the far north. It may be that Hercules did go there; or perhaps it is only that we by common consent ascribe any remarkable achievement in any place to his famous name” (\textit{Germania} 34).

The close association of Hercules Magusanus with the military served a couple of basic functions. In the first place Hercules represented masculine power and courage as Roymans notes “evidence of martial associations is the practice of depositing weapons in the sanctuary of Hercules Magusanus at Empel.”\textsuperscript{195} Additionally there is Hercules’ role as mediator between Rome and the Germanic groups. The association of Hercules in so-called barbarian groups served, in Roymans’ opinion, as cultural currency; “[t]his

\textsuperscript{193} Roymans (2009), 223.

\textsuperscript{194} Roymans (2009), 228.

\textsuperscript{195} Roymans (2009), 231.
bridging function was particularly relevant for Germanic groups, who continued to be stigmatised as barbarians by the Romans, particularly after the failure of the Augustan *Germania* policy." This stigma is evidenced by Tacitus, for while he had much to say about the positive qualities of the Germans, they refrain from urban lives in villages quite unlike the Roman design, and dress in the skins of wild animals without any regard for their appearance (*Germania*, 16, 17).

The results of his work led Roymans to the conclusion that while Hercules undoubtedly played a major role in the collective memory of the Germanic cults and particularly the Batavians. Gallo-Roman temples containing votive inscriptions and Hercules figurines are at least partially representative of the Germanic integration into the Roman world. The integration of Hercules into the Batavian cults should not strike us as strange in the least. Operating in the ancient world, where the signs and symbols of Rome were a part of the collective consciousness such adaptations make complete sense.

The integrative features of Revelation in chapter four, where the author describes the heavenly throne room in terms that are quite similar to the imperial cult can be seen as analogous to the integration of Hercules among the Batavians. In fact,

[the Hercules myth was a vital component in this process. Hercules probably played a prominent role in the origin myth of the Batavians and hence in their collective memory; they presumably saw themselves as his

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196 Roymans (2009), 231. Roymans also notes that the “pastoral values” of Hercules may have contributed to his popularity among the indigenous peoples of the Lower Rhine area. “The Rhine delta – probably the centre of the Hercules Magusanus cult – was essentially a non-villa landscape in which the agrarian economy relied heavily on cattle and horse raising. Traditionally, cattle raids may have been the social context par excellence in which Lower Rhine groups could display both martial and pastoral values,” 231.

197 Roymans (2009), 235.
decendants. [However, t]he appropriation of the Mediterranean Hercules myth reflected the friendly alliance they had with Rome at the time.\textsuperscript{198}

In Roymans’ view, the Germanic integration of Hercules was an attempt at reconciling the new socio-political composition of the Roman Empire with Germanic identity. Making use of Roman mythologies, and developing traditions according to Roman beliefs, the Batavian people attempted to integrate themselves on Roman terms using the Roman cultural language of Hercules.

\textbf{4.5. Rome and the Arverni}

Similar to the cult of Hercules among the Batavi is the cult of Mercurius Dumias among the Arverni. Utilizing the well-known Greek sculptor Zenodorus, the Arverni, possibly on the advice of Roman governors, commissioned Zenodorus at the exorbitant sum of “40 million HS…to create a colossal bronze statue of Mercury.”\textsuperscript{199} Both the enormous sum paid to Zenodorus and the selection of such a well-known Hellenistic artist suggests that the Arverni were interested in creating “the best possible Hellenistic-style image for their tribal god, and also their cultural savoir-faire.”\textsuperscript{200} The selection of the Greek sculptor and the enormous sum paid for services rendered suggest that it was of the utmost importance that the rendering of Mercury be made by one of the finest skilled artists the Empire had to offer.

Apart from phenomena like the Batavian cult of Hercules or the Arverni cult of Mercury, the practice of following inscriptions or epigraphic traditions in provincial

\textsuperscript{198} Roymans (2009), 235.


\textsuperscript{200} Woolf (1998), 216.
regions is another effective way to track the influences of Rome in provincial territories, since the tradition of inscriptions was a distinctly Roman practice.\footnote{Woolf (1998), 93.} In the case of Gaul, the inscriptions most common throughout the first century display virtually an exclusive use of Latin and their names typically taking the \textit{tria nomina} form, suggesting that these people were either Roman or Gallic Roman citizens.\footnote{Woolf (1998), 103.} It is not until the following second and third centuries that we begin to see an influx of Celtic or Germanic names, in either one or two parts.\footnote{Woolf (1998), 103.}

While this may initially appear to represent “Romanisation in reverse,” Woolf assures that the gradual incorporation of indigenous names at a later date is representative of different trends in the integration of Roman and Gallic culture. “The practice of setting up inscriptions, particularly funerary ones, seems to have extended (in the towns at least) beyond the elite to groups without Roman citizenship and Roman style names, while Roman names began to catch on in the countryside for the first time.”\footnote{Woolf (1998), 103.} In the case of Gallic elites who first took up the practice of inscriptions, they were the ones in closest contact with Rome and Roman practice; “[l]earning to be Roman, for this group, meant learning the virtues and \textit{mores} appropriate to their place in the empire of cities and the empire of friends.”\footnote{Woolf (1998), 104.}

4.6. Roman Galatia
The interaction and integration of Roman imperialism with native social bodies need not be concluded with an analysis of Gallic provinces. On the subject of ethnic identities in the Roman Empire, Karl Strobel cites the Galatians of Asia Minor as a key example of provincial subjects of Roman imperialism who had their own particular experience with Romanisation.

Strobel begins his description of Galatian identity in Asia Minor by noting the arrival of the Celtic people in the area around 275-274BCE.206 The arrival and subsequent settlement of the lands in Asia Minor need not suggest a unified nation of Celtic people. Instead, it is more representative to describe the various kinship groups that settled the area as either Tolistobogioi, Tektosages, or Trokmoi.207 Despite the variation of the three tribal groups, “the Celtic language was used all over the Galatian territories as a unifying and delimitating characteristic by the 1st century AD.”208 Upon the arrival of Celtic people in the Asia Minor in the third century BCE, the following 300 years can be seen as a process of ethnogenesis for the Galatian people, where their integration with other Anatolian indigenous populations occurred without much incident, and we begin to see Celtic integration with other social groups, notably Luwian and Phrygian populations.209 The process of integration and acculturation that follows sees the merging of different social bodies in Asia Minor, and while it remains possible to see any number of different


207 Strobel (2009), 124.

208 Strobel (2009), 125. The variation of peoples that came to settle the areas of Galatia were further distinguished by other subgroups and populi that eventually came to use the same language and in a process of ethnogenesis in Central Anatolia, 125.

209 Strobel (2009), 127.
cultural traces (Celtic, Phrygian etc.) the settlement of Asia Minor and the cities therein, the convergence of these social bodies combined with the Hellenistic influences of the 3rd century BCE and later contribute to the ethnogenesis of Galatia in Asia Minor.\footnote{Strobel (2009), 127-128.}

It is not uncommon, according to Strobel, to recognize the variation in the inscription traditions during this time of acculturation and ethnogenesis in Asia Minor. Throughout the first few centuries in the Common Era, it was typical to see variations in the inscription traditions amongst the Anatolian inhabitants, with the [varied] use of and switching between different onomastic traditions of Celtic, Anatolian, Greek, and Latin names...typical of the social milieu."\footnote{Strobel (2009), 133. Strobel goes on to note that the diversification of onomastic traditions in Anatolia is consistent in Antiquity until the 4th century CE, when Christianity completely changed these customs in Asia Minor.} While there remains diversification amongst prosopographic traditions in Asia Minor, Strobel is quick to note that there does appear to be Roman influence in Asia Minor early in the first century. After the death of the last Galatian tetrarch and the subsequent annexation of Galatia by Augustus in 25/24 BCE the dynamics of the formerly autonomous kingdom begin to change.\footnote{Strobel (2009), 128.} These changes are specific to the upper classes in urban centers such as Ankyra, which has now been converted into an autonomous Greek city or polis, where we begin to see a “switch to the onomastic traditions of Roman Citizens."\footnote{Strobel (2009), 133.} In analyzing these traditions of Ankyra, Strobel notes that, “60 men have Roman personal names, 17 have names of Roman citizens.”\footnote{Strobel (2009), 133.} Within these traditions we still find various Anatolian and Celtic names
intermingled with Roman ones, but by this time we are clearly witnessing the effects of Roman influence in the upper classes of first-century Anatolia.

These patterns suggest more than mere trends in nomenclature amongst the Galatian people; Strobel notes the new political structures of Roman rule saw the integration of the aristocratic elite of Galatia into various structures of the polis as well as the Koinon, the imperial cult of Rome. Specific to the Koinon, these appointments were to the positions of priests, and high priests (hiereus, archiereus, sebastophantes, neokoros) of the imperial cult, making these Galatian aristocratic families important supporters of the new bonds of loyalty in the provincial territory. In the Koinon, these appointments were quite often made to the Galatian aristocracy with the caveat “for life,” as the careers of Tiberius Claudius Heras and his son Tiberius Claudius Deiotarus bear witness to, both of these men served the position of priest (among other similar appointments) at the sanctuary of Kybele at Pessinus in the late first-century.

Beyond these appointments, Roman citizenship was granted to the leading families of Galatian aristocracy during the reigns of Augustus, Tiberius and Claudius, further emphasizing efforts on the part of Rome to drive roots into the provincial territory of Galatia. “From the Flavian period onwards, [the leading families of Galatia] were integrated into the senate and the leading social strata of the Roman Empire.” This does not mean that connections to their Galatian descent were severed; many Galatians

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215 Strobel (2009), 135.
216 Strobel (2009), 135.
217 Strobel (2009), 135.
218 Strobel (2009), 135.
appointed to these positions retained their heritage and made a point of emphasizing that connection. “Tiberius Claudius Gentianus, for example, is praised on his funerary monument for his erudition and his ancestry that is traced back to an unknown Asklepios as well as to Galatian tetrarchs.”219 In the genre of prosopography, we can read the inscription of Gentianus as a performance of his Galatian heritage.

Examples of alternating onomastic traditions as well as funerary inscriptions that suggest the prestige of both Roman Imperial associations as well as Galatian heritages are numerous. The endurance of native languages among the Anatolian inhabitants is further evidence that while Roman culture was embedding itself in Asia Minor in the first century and later, cultural traditions and systems of self-representation persist among various ethnic groups. We know that the Celtic language, along with the Phrygian language, was spoken until the 6th century CE, and the Luwian language of the Isaurian people persisted until the 5th/6th century CE as well.220 The fact that these languages persisted for so many years in Late Antiquity should not be interpreted merely as the endurance of language alone, but rather the endurance of entire social systems based on a “common symbolic language and symbolic tradition.”221 The endurance of native linguistic traditions as evidenced in the onomastic traditions means the endurance of different ethnic identities and systems of self-representation in the Empire.

The loss of specific languages always means the loss of a system of symbolic codes and values. These are fundamental to aspects of the mentality, cultural tradition and self-representation, all of which are

219 Strobel (2009), 135.
220 Strobel (2009), 121-122.
221 Strobel (2009), 122.
expressed in the onomastic tradition. Since the identity of ethnic groups is, to a large extent, based on a common language and a common language tradition, ethnic identity is expressed first of all in linguistic coding.  

The story of the inhabitants of the Galatian territory in Asia Minor is anything but simple. This brief overview does little justice to the complex process of ethnogenesis taking place in the 3rd century BCE and later. What is clear, however, is that despite the annexation the Galatian province in 25/24 BCE, the historical identity and ethnic traditions thrived throughout late antiquity. Roots were certainly planted by the Roman administration in the polis, the Imperial Cult in various urban centers, and moreover in the selection and Romanisation of different aristocratic families in Galatia, but close historical research on the traditions of the people of Galatia suggest that these influences did not obliterate the ethnic identities of the Galatians.

4.7. Roman Bithynia and Pontus

The story of Roman Imperialism in the territories of Bythinian and Pontos follows a different narrative altogether. The collapse of the Pontic forces and defeat of Mithridates VI by Pompey in 66 BCE meant that the task of reorganizing Pontos as a Roman province was now at hand. Jakob Højte describes the task of Pompey as an arduous one, since much of this territory “differed significantly in respect to its organisation and infrastructure from most of the other areas incorporated into the provincial system in the Greek East.” While information about the composition of the Mithridatic kingdom is

222 Strobel (2009), 122.


limited, it is acknowledged that the Pontic kingdom did not have a high level of urbanization; “there was nothing like the Greek *polis*, neither in physical appearance nor in the sense of an administrative unit.”

We also know that central to the royal administration of the land there were various castles throughout the territory, many of which were destroyed by Pompey, likely in an effort to inhibit possible threats to Roman control.

Further archaeological research suggests that the administrative layout of Pontos was quite small, with an abundance of villages scattered throughout the territory. Whatever role these scattered villages and hamlets played in pre-Roman times, they did not represent a sufficient infrastructure for Rome to convert into the new province in 63BCE. Without an existing urban template to work with, it is likely, as Jakob Højte suggests, that the inhabitants of the Roman foundations were drawn from these locations. Since the Romans did not have major urban centers to annex and convert to provincial metropolises, the pattern of Roman settlement in northern Asia Minor seems to follow the pattern of small settlements throughout the territory.

The tradition of inscriptions in Bithynia and Pontos also bears witness to their unique histories. While there is evidence of indigenous traditions among some of the villages in the territories of Pontos, the epigraphic tradition of both Pontos and Bithynia

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225 Højte (2006), 16.
226 Højte (2006), 16.
227 Højte (2006), 16.
228 Højte (2006), 16.
229 Højte (2006), 16.
suggest a strong Roman presence. In the territory of Amaseia, the former capital of the Pontic Kingdom, the majority of inscriptions are of Latin names, while the “[i]ndigenous and Persian names that were relatively common at the time of Mithridates VI…had largely disappeared.”

In a similar analysis of epigraphic traditions, Thomas Corsten looked specifically at the indigenous populations of Bithynia that were known to be of Thracian origin. Corsten’s findings suggest that while there are funerary inscriptions in the major centers of Bithynia (Nikaia, Nikomedeia, Prusa ad Olympum and Kios) that bore Thracian names, the overwhelming majority of inscriptions are Greek and Roman. Of the inscriptions found bearing Thracian nomenclature throughout the four cities investigated, virtually all were modest monuments, often demonstrating inferior workmanship. “Concerning the social status of these people with Thracian names, it is clear that – with the exception of Diliporis near Nikaia – they did not belong to the upper class of imperial Bithynia, but should be assigned to the middle, or even to the lower, classes… [furthermore, t]here is no evidence for any of them owning a large estate.” If the relatively limited number of Thracian inscriptions demonstrate middle to lower class positions in the province of Bithynia, the question of the nature of the remaining inscriptions is obvious. While some inscriptions in the Bithynian urban centers have

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234 Corsten (2006), 86.
235 Corsten (2006), 86.
Greek names attributed to them, the overwhelming majority of these inscriptions bear the
*tria nomina*, and we are told that they are estate owners or *oikonomoi*.\(^{236}\)

If virtually all of the estate ownership is accorded to Greco-Roman inhabitants of
the Bithynian province, this fact should, according to Corsten, lead us to one of two
possible conclusions about the social makeup of the Bythinian province. On the one hand,
“[o]ne could imagine that the descendants of the Bithynian landowners with Thracian
names of the Hellenistic period took Greek or Roman names or even received Roman
citizenship shortly before or during the imperial period.”\(^{237}\) Karl Strobel has
demonstrated similar trends among the Galatian people with respect to Roman names;
such policies of integrating upper class provincials into the Roman imperial system have
been well documented.

Alternately, the possibility of a radical change in the ownership of Bithynian
territory also seems possible. Given the historical developments that led to the eventual
provincializing of Bithynia the possibility of Bithynian territory coming under Roman
control is certainly plausible. The allegiance shown by Prusias I to Rome when he aided
them against the Seluecids, coupled with the aid requested by Nikomedes III and IV from
the Romans during their altercations with the Pontic king Mithridates VI left considerable
debts on the part of Bithynia to the Romans.\(^{238}\)

This certainly does not mean that the king alone was indebted, but that he
had to turn to his noblemen for help. So, what the Romans took from him he
tried to recover from the noblemen – if the Romans had not already done

\(^{236}\) Corsten (2006), 87.

\(^{237}\) Corsten (2006), 88.

\(^{238}\) Corsten (2006), 88.
just this before him. After the end of the kingdom [when Nikomedes IV
bequeathed Bithynia to Rome as a province], the situation changed from bad
to worse: even more negotiatores came in; on top of that, the publicani
arrived, and together, they plundered what was left. 239

Whether the overwhelming representation of Roman and Greek names in the
epigraphic traditions of Bithynia reflects the rapid Romanisation of indigenous
populations, or the outright transfer of land ownership from the Thracians to Romans, it
is clear that the ethnic self-representation among the upper classes of Bithynia had taken
a distinctly Roman turn. Likewise, the inscription traditions of the Pontic region suggest
that following the demise of Mithridates VI in the midst of the first century BCE,
indigenous forms of self-representation became scarce next to the dominant Greco-
Roman representations.

4.8. Roman Africa

The case of Roman Africa can hardly be overlooked in a discussion of
provincialism and the Roman Empire. In particular the work of Dick Whittaker and his
analysis of ethnicity in Roman Africa has provided indispensible critical analysis of
ethnic identities in the Roman province.

African ethnicity, can, for Whittaker, be understood as a fluid concept; that is to say
that ethnic identities are often the constructions of specific groups of people, at specified
points in time, under specific historical circumstances, and while this is a concept that
certainly needs further unpacking, suffice it to say that ethnicities are not static
characteristics, but mobile, fluid traits that ebb and flow with their historical

circumstances, and the ancient African people are no exception. Some of the best representations of the construction of ethnicity among African groups can be seen in the self-representations of Juba I, King of Numidia in the first century, as well as Juba II, his successor who would eventually become a client king under the Roman Empire. Often regarded by the Romans as an unpredictable and savage barbarian, Juba I knew how to construct African ethnicity in a meaningful way as he negotiated his identity. “He adopted symbolic, ethnic themes on his coins, such as the goat-god Ammon and the elephant head-dress, he made an ‘ancestral’ claim to command the Libyan tribes of Tripolitania, he appealed to old Massyles’ memories by putting up honorific inscriptions to Massinissa in central Numidia, and he was able to win the support of Jugurtha’s old alliance with the Gaetulians.” Juba I was thus a classic example of how identity is a fluid construction, subject to change as the social and political landscapes shift. His son, Juba II was also renowned for laying claims to different African heritages and ethnic constructs as he adapted to new and different social and political climates.

On the subject of epigraphic traditions Whittaker concedes that there exists a large dossier of inscriptions throughout Roman Africa giving testament to the endurance of African ethnicity in the colonial frontier, but, these inscriptions seem to serve as territorial boundary stones used to demarcate and compel various nomadic groups to either settle in taxable lands or to regulate the amount of time they could spend in these

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241 Whittaker (2009), 191.

242 Whittaker (2009), 191.

243 Whittaker (2009), 191.
particular locales.\textsuperscript{244} These inscriptions signal a critical point in terms of the ethnic self-representation in Roman Africa. In the case of Juba I, these were self-representations, and they were performed in an effort to generate and harness “new” ethnicities across different African social groups. In the case of the Roman territorial markers, the inscriptions were a performance of “ethnicizing and essentializing” indigenous groups, with the aim being the establishment and enforcement of boundaries and taxation. It is not until later (second century and following) in the course of Roman imperialism in the African frontier that we begin to see the integration trends of Roman imperialism that sought to incorporate upper classes of African born individuals into the Roman administration by investing them with state symbols of authority.\textsuperscript{245}

4.9. Roman Judea

While there is hardly time or space to provide a thorough consideration of the province of Judea under Roman rule, it certainly has its own distinct place in a survey of Roman provinces. While the Jewish revolts of the 60s and 130s of the Common Era are integral to understanding the composition and development of the Judean province, it is important in such an analysis to remember that Judea was never solely populated by a monotheistic, “Jewish” population.\textsuperscript{246} Furthermore, from early on in the second century (approximately 117 CE) and onwards two Roman legions were a permanent fixture in the province; following the second Jewish revolt, the defeat of Jewish forces combined with

\textsuperscript{244} Whittaker (2009), 196.

\textsuperscript{245} Whittaker (2009), 197.

the influx of Roman military persons resulted in a further shift in the ethnic balance of the province.247

In many cases, tracing the development of the Judean province means following the numismatic traditions of Roman Judea, since “[c]oins displayed their loyalty to the Empire and the holder of imperium, set against a background of glorification of the city and its points of reference.”248 Among other things, the medium of coins allowed civic entities to express “pride and prestige in an official representation of the city’s ideological position.”249 Cities like Caesarea Maritima, Sebaste, and Neapolis each demonstrate fidelity to Rome through their use of the she-wolf and the twins.250

If the aforementioned cities paid homage to Rome through their foundational coinage, this did not mean that ethnic composition was Roman as well. In the case of Caesarea Maritima and many others, these were existing Greek cities whose foundations were thoroughly Hellenic; in these cases Roman symbolism was deployed at a political level as a way of promoting status within the new world order.251 Conversely, new cities such as Aelia Capitolina—the new community of what was formerly Jerusalem—made use of Roman foundational myths not merely on a political level, but as “part of the construction of civic identity” since it was created, in a sense, ex nihilo, as an imported

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247 Belayche (2009), 169. According to Belayche a strong indication of the shift in ethnic composition can be seen in the “widespread use of Latin” in the province.

248 Belayche (2009), 168.

249 Belayche (2009), 168.

250 Belayche (2009), 171-172.

251 Belayche (2009), 171-173.
and implanted Roman settlement. A bronze coin from Aelia Capitolina portrays the founding of the colony by Hadrian himself, holding the yoke of two oxen pulling a plough, a ritual meant to recall “the foundation scene on the bank of the Tiber.”

4.10. Herod and the temple vandals

Rewinding the timeline briefly, it is worth reviewing an interesting episode of Roman-Judean interactions within the city of Jerusalem, pertaining specifically to the oft-referred centre of Jewish existence: the Temple. Josephus’ story of the plot to pull down the golden eagle is especially pertinent for our interests. In this story Josephus recounts the efforts two Jewish scholars, Judas and Matthias, attempted to have their students remove a golden eagle that had been placed on the temple by Herod (Jewish Antiquities, 17.2-5). In the story Judas and Matthias convince their students to commit this valiant act for the sake of upholding the Law. While going about their task they are caught by one of Herod’s officials and taken into custody. While in their custody Herod inquires as to why they would want to dishonor him by removing the eagle, since “he had constructed the Temple, whereas the Hasmonaeans had been unable to do anything so great for the honour of God in the hundred and twenty-five years of their reign” (Jewish Antiquities, 17.3). The outcome from this ordeal is certainly interesting. The outcome for Matthias was a harsh one, since Herod “burnt him alive with some of his companions” (Jewish Antiquities, 17.4). Herod also indicted the incumbent High Priest (a different Matthias) citing that he was “partly to blame for what had happened,” and deposed of him choosing

253 Belayche (2009), 174-175.
to appoint his wife’s brother Joazar as the new High Priest instead (*Jewish Antiquities*, 17.4).

While there exist many avenues for exploring the episode of the golden eagle, particularly as an example of Jewish persecution at the hands of foreign rulers, it is critical at this juncture that we not lose sight of the relevance of this story within the broader narrative of provincialism under Roman rule. The installment of the eagle on the Temple is a direct sign of the domination of Rome over the Judeans. In placing the eagle in such a place, Herod places a symbol of Roman power at the very centre of the Judean cosmos. The message could hardly be clearer: Judea is under Rome.

While Josephus’ story draws upon the honor and bravery of those involved in the removal of the eagle “in accordance with their law,” the short narrative betrays, in none too subtle terms, how the actions of both the Jews involved as well as Herod and his ruling elite fit within the greater narrative of provincial life under the Romans. On the part of the Judeans they struggle to maintain their identity in the face of being branded by a Roman symbol of power, and for Herod and the Romans, the insubordinate actions of the Judeans must be dealt with swiftly, and order must be restored. In this context Herod’s displeasure with seeing the Jewish people’s reaction to all of his hard work in constructing and branding the temple is in some ways understandable, if not entirely justifiable. Such involvement was seen as an honor, as the case of the Arverni’s sculpture of Mercury indicates, having been sculpted with great skill by none other than Zenodorus.

Finally, the removal of the high priest Matthias and installment of Herod’s own family in the position represents possibly one of the most intelligible and logical moves
in our colonial framework. Karl Strobel demonstrated in extremely clear terms the politics of colonization as it relates to installation and administration of priestly offices in provincial Rome, demonstrating that Galatian society was mediated by the Romans in part via the appointment of priestly offices among Galatian aristocracies. This example of social stratification in ancient Galatia has a contemporaneous expression in the administration of the Temple in Jerusalem under Herod’s rule. While it may be tempting to view the removal of high priest Matthias and installment of brother-in-law Joazar as one more example of the longstanding persecution of the Jewish people, such a view necessarily partitions the actions of Herod, setting them apart as something distinct and unique, as so much scholarship on Jewish and Christian antiquities is wont.

By removing the blinders of Judeo-Christian essentialism, histories like Herod and the golden eagle can become much more intelligible in view of their broader social histories. Just like the Galatians, the decision to remove Matthias from office and place Joazar in his stead reflects political ends that are implicit in the appointment of priests in the Judean province. Utilizing this passage from Josephus to describe the anti-Jewish sentiments of a particular Roman leader represents an effort to remove it from its grounded social history and instead impute it with the branding of a timeless example of the Jewish struggle. Such efforts do not take us any closer to understanding the social histories of Judean provincial life. Instead, they mystify experiences that are, at root, genuinely similar to the experiences of other provincial cults in the Roman Empire.

The restoration of the temple by Herod is supported by the Roman affirmation of religious traditions. In situations where indigenous populations had their own systems of
belief and practice, the Romans allowed them to maintain those systems, or, as the case of the Batavians with Hercules Magusanus demonstrates, interpret those systems in new and different ways based on new social circumstances.

By this point it should be clear that Roman Judea ought to be thought about a lot like cities in other provinces of Asia Minor: cities in Roman Judea would adopt Roman mythologies in principle to demonstrate fidelity to the new order, but would largely maintain the social and cultural identities that were previously established, as the case often was for cities with strong Greco-traditions. This was not, however, the case for all cities. With the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and the second rebellion of the 130s, Jerusalem stands as the exception of Roman tolerance to allow cities to maintain their previous social and cultural systems. The newly named Aelia Capitolina, with its thoroughly Roman population, extensive use of Latin, and strategic deployment of Roman symbolism is a clear testament to this fact. Moreover, the institution of the Temple in Jerusalem can also find meaningful analogues in the administration of imperial cults in places like Galatia. The work of Karl Strobel has proven instrumental in describing the ways in which the office of Sebastoi is utilized as a mode of social stratification, and has provided an indispensable lens for rereading the histories of people like Josephus within the Roman colonial framework.

4.11. Conclusions

The conquests of Alexander saw the Hellenistic age begin to take hold over the Ancient Near East; concepts of small, separated communities had to begin to make way for a new kinship systems and collective identity. As the shift from local kingships to an
age of collective, cosmopolitan living took hold there came a re-imagination of cosmic order. Ancient conceptions of the divine and human relation thereto could no longer be based on a local scale; the expanding geopolitical makeup resulted in a dislocation not only of community identity that saw social and political identities on a local basis come to an end, but the end of the association of the divine on a local scale as well. Religions of “anywhere” had to address the new geopolitical landscape. The dislocation of local kingships meant the dislocation of local traditions; a new way of imagining oneself in relation to the divine was necessary.

In similar form to this cosmological makeover was the subsequent rise and spread of the Roman Empire, wherein the geopolitical landscape became more solidified, offering more of a fixed structure for outlying provincial groups. Being the center of the Empire, Rome set the pulse for everyone else, and as Clifford Ando has described, Roman imperial ideology took significant steps not only to ensure its hand was cast over the expanse of its conquests, but also to ensure that the authority exercised over the Empire was perceived as legitimate; a task achieved both through symbolic representations of empire as well as institutional apparatuses that established Rome as a legitimate figure of colonial domination.

Despite the supposed consistency in political rule the relationship between provincial cults and the Roman Empire is hardly something that can be described as uniform and homogenous, where the historical circumstances that define the interactions between Rome and the provincial territories are often variegated. The adroit observations of Nico Roymans specifically on the relationship between the Batavian cult of Hercules
and the Roman Empire have yielded many interesting insights regarding the relationship between the so-called “fringe barbaric groups” and the “urbane Romans.” Coming to see how the Batavi integrated themselves with Roman ruler through the cult of Hercules provides interesting insights on how these Germanic people understood themselves in a Roman Imperial context. In a somewhat different context, the Arverni’s use of Zenodorus and their commitment to producing a representation of native religiosity in the finest Hellenistic form bears witness to the power and influence of imperial presence in Gaul. Using Zenodorus’ skill or the image of Hercules meant using Roman symbols; it meant using imperial language to perform as provincial subjects. In the case of Galatia as well as Judea, we can see similar strategies in the adoption and integration of the aristocratic classes to the imperial cult. In the case of the Galatian aristocracy, this meant performing the part of priest or high priest in the imperial cult. We can see through various inscriptions that these names often meant that these Galatian people adopted (and in many cases were classed as) Romans citizenship. These claims to Roman identity, however, did not mean that identities as Galatian peoples were lost. In the case of Judea we can witness first hand through Josephus the way the office of priest was utilized as a means of social stratification. The inclusion of Judea in such a survey is integral not simply for the sake of breadth in examining provincial responses to the Roman Empire, but also in establishing discourses on the histories of people under Roman rule that do not begin their narratives with Judeo-Christian lenses.

If the epigraphic tradition has taught us anything it is that the inscriptions that celebrated Roman ethnicity were often counterbalanced with indigenous Galatian
nomenclature, be they Celtic or otherwise. Conversely, we see far fewer ethnic self-representations in the epigraphic traditions of Bithynia, Pontos, and even Africa. The majority of inscriptions in these areas are Latin, and when we do see inscriptions of indigenous traditions, it is clear, as in the case of Roman Africa, that these inscriptions are, more often than not, shaped by Roman classifications themselves developed for Roman purposes.

While the differences in representation among epigraphic traditions certainly requires further study and research, it is clear that as imperial subjects, each province bears witness to its own histories and its own distinct encounters with Roman imperialism on the frontier, and these particular histories result in their own patterns of social and cultural representation for provincial subjects. At the same time, these individual encounters serve to assist us in describing and painting a broader picture of the colonial/imperial experience, helping to deconstruct the mystified histories of specific peoples in antiquity by demonstrating that the experiences of provinces under Roman rule, while often diverse, do not represent idiosyncrasies detached from the geopolitical landscape.

If there is an avenue for further discussion on the relationship Roman Imperialism and the frontier, the discussion is one which utilizes the theoretical positioning of postcolonial studies and takes into account the relationship between colonizer and colonized in the particular circumstances that contribute to their interactions on the colonial field of play. In situations of imperial domination there must be an approach that seeks to take into account the complex relationship between colonizer and colonized that attempts to understand and address the relationship imposed by dominant hegemonic
power structures, acknowledging not general principles or trends, but the distinct social and political nuances that are necessary to describing the colonial context. The various social bodies surveyed in this chapter demonstrate that the populations that eventually came under Roman rule were a diverse, heterogeneous collection. Some had similar reactions to Roman rule, but more often than not the outcome of Roman imperialism resulted in a large spectrum of responses. This tells us that not only are provincial territories acting in diverse and distinct ways, so too is Roman imperialism forced to engage and formulate counter-responses to each individual provincial context. Therefore, “[w]e should be debating not uniformity…but a new ‘cultural logic’ of variations and the ‘cultural bricolage’ of provincial civilizations.”

To this extent, the very idea of “Romanisation” as it is used to discuss provincial integration to the imperial administrative apparatus seems to homogenize and streamline what is otherwise a very complex, diverse collection of interactions. “‘Being Roman’ should not even be expected to mean uniformity or acculturation (even if that sometimes happens), much less the adoption of a specific material culture.”

Beyond what the term “Romanisation” should mean is the problem of what Romanisation does mean. This term or concept is a relatively modern one, often used to describe the cultural hegemony of Roman rule and cultural practice amid the territories that eventually came to be provinces. The problem with such a conception, especially in modern contexts of research and description, is that Romanisation seems to suggest a level of uniformity that

254 Whittaker (2009), 199.
255 Whittaker (2009), 200.
is inconsistent with our understandings of provincial life and their material cultures.\textsuperscript{256}

Ultimately, it is a term that distorts the histories of peoples both prior to and after contact with Roman Imperialism. If we are to adequately describe the relationship between provincial territories and Rome it will begin with the caveat that each province encountered imperial domination on its own terms, and moreover, Roman imperialism too encountered and interacted with each province in different contexts. The relationship between colonial/postcolonial theory and studies of antiquity must be one that trades classifications of homogeneity, uniformity and idiosyncrasy for heterogeneity, diversity, and stratification.

\textsuperscript{256} Whittaker (2009), 200.
5. Revelation, Comparison, and Redescription: Tenable Futures for the Study of Religion

The Idirans saw themselves as agents in this great reordering. They were the chosen – at first allowed the peace to understand what God desired, and then goaded into action rather than contemplation by the very forces of disorder they gradually understood they had to fight. God had a purpose beyond study for them. They had to find their own place, in the whole galaxy at least; perhaps even outside that, as well. The more mature species could look to their own salvation; they had to make their own rules and find their own peace with God (and it was a sign of his generosity that he was happy with their achievements even when they denied Him). But the others – the swarming, chaotic, struggling peoples – they needed guidance.

-- Iain M. Banks, Consider Phlebas (158)

5.1. Introduction: analogy over genealogy

We cannot overestimate the value of sketching the in-between of antiquity when investigating the social context of writings like Revelation. By establishing a social and historical context for provincial territories in a colonial-imperial framework we understand Revelation to have been composed under, we can then begin to sketch a picture of what the context was. This context is not meant to serve as a description of the socio-historical position of a single sect of people under Empire, instead it serves to describe the social location for provincial inhabitants struggling for self-identity in an imperial situation.

With that said, it is clear that there are limitations on the descriptive power of provincial responses to colonialism when it comes to reading Revelation as a document composed in a colonial context. While many of the examples provide insights into the social and cultural milieu of Roman colonization, finishing with a general description of the colonial context is not the end-goal of this analysis. Of the materials surveyed none have specifically replicated the apocalyptic discourse found in Revelation, and while each
of these examples can be said to negotiate their identities in an imperial context, John’s textual Apocalypse still suggests that something different is happening. The fantastic descriptions of cosmic destruction/renewal and the bizarre cast of characters suggest that something distinct is happening; something that needs to be explored further. This is not to say, however, that the material in Revelation is unique; rather it is one amongst a variety of textual responses to colonial domination. Reading Revelation as a distinct production of colonialism does not mean having to disregard the materials found in surrounding provinces. The integrative function of Hercules among the Batavians provides an excellent framework for understanding how provincial territories imbibed imperial ideology, or the traditions surrounding the office of priests in the imperial cult as demonstrated among the Galatians. The aim in describing the diverse collections of responses to the Roman Empire is not that we might eventually find the perfect analogue to the discourses that appear in Revelation; the aim, instead, is to begin to sketch a much broader description of the social, political, and historical topography that might provide a more comprehensive, inclusive, and moreover intelligible description of the social environment of a text like Revelation.

With the work of chapter four behind us, we must now look at the text of Revelation. Despite the fantastic, and often bizarre narrative of the text we must concede that there is nothing unique to this text; that there is “nothing utterly exotic. We must be able to declare that [the Apocalypse of John, as a text composed in the first century,] was an instance of something known, of something that we have seen before.”

In attempting to ground apocalyptic works in a more historical context, Jonathan Z. Smith has argued that apocalyptic literature is best understood as wisdom literature that lacks a royal patron. For Smith, wisdom literature is essentially scribal propaganda that celebrated the divine nature of the king as one who maintains social and cosmic order. Wisdom literature begins to take a turn toward the apocalyptic when the power of the king is contested. The “proto-apocalyptic,” as Smith terms it, focuses on “the saving power of the king, his destruction of his enemies [and] the establishment of his rule and law.” One does not encounter an example of a full-blown apocalypse until such propaganda becomes dissociated from any specific king; a key feature of the Greco-Roman period. A full-blown or “proper” apocalypse is concerned more with polemics and prophecies against foreigners wherein cosmic and social order completely breakdown, and a vaguely described “savior-king” comes, often from the sky or sea to return order to the cosmos.

### 5.2. The cessation of a cosmic center

If we attempt to read Revelation under the rubric laid out by Smith we can see how Smith’s understanding of apocalypse clearly describes Revelation. Having been likely written sometime in the first century, whatever Jewish-Jesus people the author was

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259 Smith (1978), 79.

260 Smith (1978), 79.

261 Smith (1978), 81.

262 Smith (1978), 81-82.

263 I suspect that Smith’s consideration of apocalypse actually begins with Revelation, since its absence in Smith’s essay has a deafening quality.
addressing were certainly already living under the foreign domination of the Roman Empire. Commentators generally agree that the name “Babylon” which comes up frequently in the text is almost certainly a reference to Rome. Various internal indicators seem to suggest as much, when one considers the significant comparison made within the text of Babylon as the “first destroyer of the temple” with Rome who came to be the “second destroyer of the temple.” Within this framework “[i]t is highly unlikely that the name would have been used before the destruction of the temple by Titus.” For Smith, in the ancient paradigm the figure of the king was where social and cosmic order was derived from. In the case of the Jewish Jesus people in the first century, this is a function fulfilled by the temple, until 70 CE, when Titus and the Roman army destroyed the temple, where we have the cessation of the cosmic center. Whether or not the hearers of John’s Apocalypse were inhabitants of Jerusalem (and it is almost certain they were not), the loss of the temple would still have been seen as a loss of a cosmic center for Jews living in the ancient Mediterranean.265

5.3. Insiders and outsiders in Revelation

Establishing the boundaries of insiders and outsiders in Revelation is not a simple task. While polemics against Rome are certainly present in the text, arguing that Revelation represents the anti-Roman sentiments of a group in Asia Minor in the first century is an oversimplification to say the least. Having a basic understanding of colonialism means we are aware that the colonial field of play is highly integrated; it is a


265 Yarbro Collins (1984), 98. It should be noted as well that Jews, as well as Jewish Christians, composed apocalyptic narratives in response to the destruction of the temple as 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch attest.
context where various competing factors come into contact with one another, and almost always resulting in a “colonial bricolage” on the frontier. Furthermore, we know from first century investigations throughout the empire that approaches by Rome to its conquests varied depending on geographical location, and that native reactions to Roman conquest were nothing if not diverse.

Keeping these details in mind, it should go without saying that while Revelation polemicizes against Rome, careful attention must be paid to what constitutes “Rome” within the text. While the symbolic use of Babylon may be seen as a reflection of Rome as the “destroyers of the temple,” every iteration of imperial presence in the text cannot simply be interpreted as “Rome” in its broadest sense.

The imperial cult stands as an exceptional example of imperial presence in Revelation; one that many scholars have identified as playing a significant role in the text. David Barr draws attention to the significance of the imperial cult in Revelation by making reference to the comprehensive descriptive effort of the author in chapter 4.

[B]y setting this scene in a throne room, John invites comparison with Roman traditions. Much of what John describes here can be seen as a parody of the ceremonies of the imperial court. From the throne surrounded by courtiers to the mysterious silence of the central figure, from the circular configuration to the cosmic images, from the hymns and acclamations of power and worth to the colors and titles used there are numerous echoes and parallels of the popular image of Roman court ceremonial.266

While there are certainly aspects to the author’s description of heavenly worship in the throne room that have analogues in Hebrew literature—most notably in Ezekiel—the point here is that imperial worship, epitomized in the imperial cult, was certainly an

active element in the first century social milieu of the author, since by the middle of the first century there were at least eighty cities in Asia Minor that had priesthods for the Sebastoi.\textsuperscript{267} The presence of imperial sanctuaries meant that “[t]emples, statues, and reliefs devoted to the worship of Roman emperors (and select relatives) played a vital role in civic life.”\textsuperscript{268} For the inhabitants of Asia Minor in the first century, the imperial cult was a primary method for provincial inhabitants to negotiate their relationships with a distant and removed Rome.

Ultimately one should not over interpret the imitative aspect of the throne room scene. While the parallels between the imperial cult and Revelation are certainly present, this is ultimately another example of something we have seen before, namely in the integration of Hercules by the Batavians. Certainly the signs and symbols are different, but in terms of a provincial group internalizing and then representing Roman signs and symbols, they are both instances of provincial entities operating within a context of imperial ideology.

That the imperial cult offered Anatolian inhabitants an opportunity to negotiate their identities with the distant Principate is certainly part of the story, especially since the temples, statues, and reliefs undoubtedly would have comprised part of the “signs of empire” that were so integral to establishing Rome in Asia Minor. In the case of the imperial sanctuary in Ephesus, “the worshipper would enter the structure and immediately confront two sets of statues: on one level rested a series of forty engaged


\textsuperscript{268} Frilingos (2004), 23.
deities from across the Mediterranean world and above these stood colossal statues of Titus, Vespasian, Domitian, and Domitia.”

For a native Ephesian walking into the imperial sanctuary the message is quite clear: the local gods of the Mediterranean support (quite literally as well) the Emperors. “The imperial cult brought together local and imperial symbolism to project a stable Roman order.”

Representations of Rome in the imperial cult were only part of the context in the first century. While sanctuaries of the imperial cult would have been widespread in Asia Minor, this should not be interpreted as the heavy hand of Rome imposing Emperor worship on its conquered territories. “Civic efforts established emperor worship in Asia Minor, and the cult acted both as a symbol of Roman hegemony and as a figure in civic rivalries.” The case of the imperial cult in Galatia stands as a prime example of how the office of the imperial cult was administered by Galatian elites. That the imperial cult became quite popular in Asia Minor can be seen by its spread to places like Pergamum and Nicomedia, resulting in grandiose sanctuaries that came to dominate their city centers. These details should not, however, lead one to the conclusion that this was a result of a “systematic imperial program.” “[I]mperial sanctuaries were founded in Asia Minor at the instigation of provincial elites, which sent delegations to Rome to compete for honor.”

As observed in the review of provincial cults in the Roman empire, evidence for the implementation and administration of imperial cults in Asia

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Minor does not suggest that these institutions were “the face of Rome.” Instead, the evidence clearly indicates that while the sanctuaries were establishments where representations of empire were to be found, they were foremost institutions where native inhabitants of Anatolia sought the status and prestige of the office of priest of the imperial cult.

If provincial elites were the ones often in charge of the imperial sanctuaries, an alternative reading of the “synagogues of Satan” found in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation might be possible. To the assembly in Smyrna the author writes, Οἶδα σου τὴν θλῖψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ, καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἅπαν συναγωγὴ τοῦ Σατανᾶ, “I know of your trouble and poverty, but you are rich and [I know] of the blasphemy from those who call themselves Jews and are not, but [are] a synagogue of Satan.” A similar message is sent to the assembly of Philadelphia, ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἅπαν ψεύδονται. ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἣν ήξουσιν καὶ προσυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γνῶσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἡγάπησά σε. “Behold I will give to the synagogue of Satan, those calling themselves Jews and are not but are liars, I will make them come and bow at your feet and they will know that I loved you.”

The history of translations is murky on the “συναγωγὴ τοῦ Σατανᾶ,” often rendering it as the “assembly of Satan.” It is doubtless that efforts to render the passage as “assembly” over the preferred “synagogue,” as is the policy of the New American Bible, reflect a desire to avoid making any reference to anti-Jewish sentiments in Revelation. Adela Yarbro Collins makes no such concessions in her discussion of the synagogues of
Satan in these passages. For Yarbro Collins, the passage reflects the tense relationships between Christians and Jews as the Christians were being excluded from the synagogues and communities of Smyrna and Philadelphia.\(^{274}\) Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has made similar arguments about the rising tensions between Jews and Christians.\(^{275}\) For both these scholars, and certainly others, worrying about anti-Semitic content in these passages is not the issue. Instead, for these scholars the passages reflect growing first-century tensions between Jews and Christians, who previously had shared in the usage of the synagogues, but had recently parted ways. For both Yarbro Collins and Fiorenza, the separation of Christians and Jews from the synagogues provides the key context for reading chapters 2 and 3.

The problem with this position, it seems, is that it rests on a false bifurcation between Jews and Christians in the text. That is, nowhere in Revelation is there a reference to Χριστιανος; the tendency to characterize these passages as a binary between Jews and Christians seems to rest on the covert assumption that “Christians” exist in this text as a real, stable category of people who have been engaged in a tense relationship with “the Jews.” For Yarbro Collins and Fiorenza, the unargued assertion that Christians are battling it out with Jews in a first century context seems to gloss over some pretty hefty assumptions about the identities of the major players represented in the text. In chapter 3 of Crisis and Catharsis Yarbro Collins seeks to identify the social situation of Revelation and touches on the perceived crisis that the people were enduring. In her

\(^{274}\) Yarbro Collins (1984), 85-86.

subsection, “Conflict with Jews,” Yarbro Collins describes the tenuous relationship between “Christians” and “Jews” referring to Christians no less than eleven times in two pages.276 It is not simply the ample use of the classification that is notable, but the unargued implementation of this classification as a meaningful category in the text that is misleading to an accurate reading of the “synagogue of Satan.” Yarbro Collins’ “casual” discussion of the tensions for Christians in these passages (and many others) rests on the problem of studying Revelation as a canonical, New Testament text. While the actual text of John’s Apocalypse has done nothing to indicate to Yarbro Collins that Christians are having troubles, the placement of Revelation within the Christian canonical tradition has covertly done that for her. “In some respects, the language of ‘Christian Origins’ actually exacerbates the problem, since in two words it manages to impute both an originary status to the New Testament writings, and to claim for those writings a specifically Christian identity.”277 The discussion of Yarbro Collins and others suggests the continual tacit acceptance that “Christianity” seems to represent “a coherent, sensible, and informative classification for what we are studying when we study the writings of the New Testament.”278 In opposition to her copious references to Christians, Yarbro Collins spends considerable time at both unpacking the significance of the classification “Jew” in these passages as it relates to the communities in Smyrna and Philadelphia, whilst seamlessly referring to the Christians in these passages who were also the “true Jews”; an exercise in classification that is bewildering to say the least.

276 Yarbro Collins (1984), 85-86.  
Returning to the issue of the synagogue of Satan, a more accurate reading might align both references to the synagogue of Satan in the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia with the reference to ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Σατανᾶ “the throne of Satan” and the place ὅπου ὁ Σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ “where Satan lives” in the message to Pergamum. As has been established by Christopher Frilingos, we know that the imperial cult in Pergamum was well established, resulting in a monumental sanctuary in the city center. Instead of utilizing a twentieth century binary of συναγωγή and ἐκκλησίας referring to synagogue and church, why not read συναγωγή as “place of gathering” and ἐκκλησίας as an “assembly gathering”? For Jews (first century and otherwise), the interpretation of synagogue as a place of worship is extremely limiting; it was a locale that served to maintain ethnic identities that came to the foreground for Jews in the diaspora since the root of the term συναγωγή literally means, “to gather.”

By employing a more direct translation of the terms, reading the “gathering place of Satan” reference in the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia coalesces well with the reference to the “throne of Satan” comment in the letter to Pergamum, “that is also the place where Satan lives.” The imperial cult in Pergamum was one of the most monumental imperial cults in Asia Minor. Steven J. Friesen notes that the sanctuary in Pergamum was the first imperial cult in Asia Minor, and as such, the high priest of the sanctuary bore (for a time) the title of “high priest of Asia.”

279 It should also be noted that reading the synagogue of Satan as a reference to the imperial cult makes sense in light of descriptions of the heavenly throne room in chapter 4 of Revelation. The author’s condemnation of worship in the place of Satan and Satan’s throne make more sense when read against the grand descriptions of chapter 4. The author makes a point at discrediting the imperial cult in chapters 2 and 3, only to demonstrate the “heavenly imperial court” in chapter 4.

280 Steven J. Friesen (2001), Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins (Oxford University Press), 42.
the comment of the “throne of Satan” in Pergamum makes considerable sense since the
history of the imperial cult in Asia Minor has deep roots in Pergamum.

Through this reading the institution of the imperial cult, while certainly
representing Rome in Asia Minor, also represents a distinguishing mark for insiders and
outsiders among inhabitants of Asia Minor. For the communities of Smyrna and
Philadelphia, “those who call themselves Jews and are not” clearly is meant to denote
people who claim to be with “us” and are not, signifying an insider/outsider discourse
that seems to be centered on participation of illegitimate forms of association, most likely
in this situation, the imperial cult. The insider/outsider discourse at work in these
passages therefore seems to be embedded with both representations of Roman
imperialism in the form of statues and Roman insignia and the institutional administration
of native Anatolian inhabitants. The messages to Philadelphia, Smyrna, and Pergamum
are therefore embedded in a complex set of relationships that bear witness to the
heterogeneous colonial field of play.

The letters to the seven assemblies provide us with even more information on who
the insiders and outsiders are. In the letters the author takes care to encourage
perseverance to different assemblies (Smyrna in 2:10, Thyatira in 2:25, Philadelphia in
3:11 etc.) but also to admonish inappropriate behaviors (Ephesus in 2:4, Pergamum in
2:14, Laodicea 3:16 etc.). Each of the assemblies addressed have qualities the author
dislikes, and he sets out in these letters to make those qualities known, effectively
distancing himself—and those who reject these unbecoming qualities—from the others,
or outsiders. Of these outsiders are people like the Nicolatians, Jezebel, and Balaam who
are known to the author by their teachings, and have been sharing these ideas with the people in Ephesus Thyatira, and Pergamum. Who these figures are remains unclear to this day. Whether they were part of an itinerant group of people advocating an alternative “Jesus/Christ-centered message” is not apparent from the text; what remains clear is that the author of the Apocalypse does not favor their ideas.\textsuperscript{281} Yarbro Collins has suggested that the tenor of the letters in chapters 2 and 3 suggest that Jezebel, Balaam and the Nicolatians were advocating integration to the Greco-Roman culture for economic, political and social reasons.\textsuperscript{282}

Closely related to the admonishment of those who hold to false teachings is the censure of people who eat foods sacrificed to idols (2:14, 20). David deSilva has suggested that the chastisement of those who eat these foods is likely a reference to the general participation in trade guilds in Greco-Roman society. “Each guild had a patron deity, and the guild’s activities included sacrificing to that deity (and no doubt the Emperor’s \textit{genius} as well), followed by a common meal in the main dish of which was the sacrificed animal.”\textsuperscript{283} Membership to the guild meant participation in the rituals; participation was not just of symbolic importance, it was a way of ensuring social and economic positioning for oneself.\textsuperscript{284} The reprimand from the author in this case compels


\textsuperscript{282} Yarbro Collins (1984), 74-75.


\textsuperscript{284} deSilva (1992), 382.
those who participate in the guilds to either abstain from such bonding rituals and remain true to “us,” or continue eating foods sacrificed to idols and take up with “them.”

While there remains much debate surrounding the finer points of chapters 2 and 3, the message the author is attempting convey is the separation of the elect from the Roman Empire. Refusing the teachings of Balaam, Jezebel and the Nicolaitans and the close proximity of the additional caveat of abstaining from eating food sacrificed to idols suggests that integration with Greco-Roman social practices is a key feature that serves to set up boundaries and distinctions of “us and them” from the outset of John’s Apocalypse. The conditions laid out by the author are only strengthened by the previous characterizations of participation in the imperial cult. In short, the author seems to be quite concerned with cultural practices of the seven assemblies.

Skipping to the closing passages of John’s Apocalypse, one might consider the passage in 22:18-19 and its implicit language designating insiders and outsiders:

Μαρτυρῶ ἐγὼ παντὶ τῷ ἀκούοντι τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου, ἐάν τις ἐπιθῇ ἐπ᾽ αὐτᾶ ἐπιθήσει ὁ θεὸς ἐπ᾽ αὐτὸν τὰς πληγὰς τὰς γεγραμμένας ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ, καὶ ἐάν τις ἀφέσῃ ἀπὸ τῶν λόγων τοῦ βιβλίου τῆς προφητείας ταύτης, ἀφεῖλε ὁ θεὸς τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ἐκ τῆς πόλεως τῆς ἁγίας τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ. “I bear witness to everyone who hears the prophetic words of this book: if anyone adds to it God will add to him the plagues that were written in this book, and if anyone removes words from this prophetic book, God removes his share from the tree of life and from the holy city written in this book.”

There are several features about this passage that are noteworthy. First of all, the “narrative time” has changed. Until this point in the narrative we have been caught up in the visions of the seer that began with a throne room visitation in chapter 4, and

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285 Yarbro Collins (1984), 88.
culminated with the judgment of the dead and vision of the new heaven and new earth in chapter 21. The vision sequence has captured events that are to come, but 22:18-19 the narrative sequence breaks and returns to time before the vision sequence, returning the audience to “authorial real-time.”

In this passage the author describes insiders and outsiders in the most explicit sense. Insiders are the ones who heed what is written in this book. Under no circumstances is anything to be added or taken away form what is written. The author takes control of establishing the conceptual boundaries that mark who is with “us” and who is not. Robert Royalty comments on the nature of the warning in 22:18-19 when he notes:

The author, a master reader of prophetic texts, attempts to circumscribe the way all future readers would read this text. Taking the voice of God, he claims to control interpretation. Indeed, he claims to control God’s retributive actions according to how the reader responds…Power is withheld from the audience by the author, who calls down plagues or removes blessing with the power of the (biblion). Any act of interpretation brings with it the inscribed curses of the Apocalypse and grammatical excision cuts off eternal life.  

The core thesis of Rev. 22:18-19 is a clear attempt on the part of the author to retain all power, and pronounce a final judgment on the recipients of these words based on the way in which they read the text. “Reading is not a passive act of reciting words aloud but rather an active process of interpretation and understanding. Reading is above all a political act, and that is why it is a threat.”

In this context Rev. 22:18-19 is significant. In an effort to contextualize the warning of 22:18-19 it is helpful to consider other warnings. As Royalty notes, “[w]arning against

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adding or subtracting words had its origins in public documents such as boundary
markers or gravestones, but was less common in scriptural texts.”  
For all those who
may share the ideals and principles similar to those in Revelation, the author makes one
additional caveat that is the final word on insiders and outsiders from his perspective: if
you deviate from anything written here, you fall outside of this community.

This final comment standing at the end of the Apocalypse serves as a parenthetical
caption: the description, condemnation and judgment of Rome remains. Rome is certainly
out of favor with the author, a point that is easily grasped. The closing comments also
stand to enforce—as strongly as the author can imagine—the pronouncements made
toward whom this text is oriented. Referring back to chapters 2 and 3, the illegitimate
associations that the seven communities have been guilty of is a perfect example of the
illegitimate couplings. In light of the closing comments of 22:18-19, the denouncement of
those who adhere to the teachings of Balaam, Jezebel, and the Nicolations, the eating of
foods sacrificed to idols, and participate in the assembly of Satan takes on a new
dimension. The warnings of chapters 2 and 3 have been outfitted with a cosmic
condemnation in an effort to clearly draw the boundaries (as stipulated in Revelation)
between who is with us, and who is not.

5.4. Cosmic renewal in Revelation

There may not be a better example of cosmic renewal in the apocalyptic paradigm
than the book of Revelation. In Smith’s theory of the apocalyptic text, after the complete
breakdown of cosmic and social order, a “vaguely described” savior-king arrives and re-

establishes cosmic and social order. In the midst of chapter 19 we are told that the sky opened up, καὶ ἱδοὺ ἕπειθεν λευκός καὶ ὁ καθίζεινος ἐπ’ αὐτόν καλούμενος πιστὸς καὶ ἁληθινός, “and behold, a white horse, and the one sitting on it was called faithful and true.” The author scores an excellent mark in his depiction of a “vaguely described savior king” here. Upon arrival, the vague rider, along with his armies, executes a final cleanup on the scene, decimating all in opposition.

In the narrative leading up to this scene, the foreign domination of Rome and the chaos that plagued the world over—most notably in the form of the seven trumpets and bowls—finds its ultimate conclusion. The creation of the new heaven, new earth, and the new Jerusalem signals that the former heaven and earth has passed away. The illegitimate domination of Rome and the cosmos that had been characterized as being submerged in chaos throughout the majority of the narrative is finally obliterated, culminating in a restored, ordered cosmos.

The creation of the new heaven, earth and Jerusalem is the resultant product of the cosmic renewal of Revelation. The endemic chaos that defined the cosmos for the author is promptly turned on its head; order is restored, and we are informed that, ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, “God’s house is with humanity.” Not simply is the cosmos restored, but the legitimate rule of God has been made right, since he dwells with people in a restored cosmos. On the subject of the new Jerusalem, Stephen Moore has convincingly argued that the depictions of a new Jerusalem demonstrate the implications of imperial ideology for the author of Revelation. In the process of obliterating Rome/

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289 Smith (1978), 82.
Babylon and instituting cosmic and social order, the author remains beholden to the deep-rooted imperial ideology that permeates his existence. For Moore, while Revelation’s disdain for Rome is beyond question, the culmination of a restored cosmos and, more importantly, a restored Jerusalem points to the degree to which the narrative of Revelation is governed by imperial ideology. According to Stephen Moore there exists a symbiotic relationship between Revelation’s apocalyptic eschatology and Roman imperial ideology, one that, for all Revelation’s ostensible antipathy toward Rome, reduces Revelation to representing the divine sphere as a kind of über-Rome, or Roman Empire writ large, and as such compromises its endeavor to shatter the relentless cycle of empire once and for all.290

For Moore, empire is in the author’s blood, it is the indelible matrix that makes up his worldview and as such everything the author attempts to do in his writing is “colored in a shade of Roman imperial ideology.” In the same way that the prosopohraphic traditions of Galatia and Bithynia indicate an internalization of Greek and Roman nomenclature, or the way the Batavians integrated the figure of Hercules, so too does Revelation imbibe its imperial surroundings even as it directs its animosity toward it.

For Jonathan Z. Smith and his apocalyptic paradigm, the Book of Revelation fits well as a text concerned with the use of paradigms for typological ends. Given the description offered by Smith, more general deductions about the genre apocalypse might be made. Smith’s conclusion about the apocalyptic narrative being essentially wisdom literature in the absence of a royal court and patron means that the cessation of native kingship situates the apocalyptic narrative as a response to foreign domination. The context of colonialism (as Smith has already alluded to) is a prime for an apocalyptic

situation. Jørgen Podemann Sørensen has also identified colonial domination as a key ingredient to apocalypticism when he notes that “the prevalence of apocalypticism in the narratives and the magical literature of Hellenistic Egypt registered a reaction to foreign rule and culture, i.e. both to cultural conflict and to the many and drastic social changes brought about by the Ptolemaic régime.”

For Smith and Sørensen, apocalypticism should be viewed not solely as a catalogue of elements found in particular “religious materials,” but as elements or patterns to be viewed “in combination [with] their underlying social structure.” What Smith found was that apocalyptic literature, despite being filled with narratives of cosmic renewal and various descriptions of otherworldly things, was rooted in socio-political historical circumstances. In other words, apocalyptic literature was literature concerned first and foremost with the social, political, and cultural concerns of people living in situations of foreign domination. In Smith’s own words, apocalyptic narratives surface in Late Antiquity “not as a response to religious persecution but as an expression of the trauma of the cessation of native kingship.” To translate Smith a bit differently, apocalyptic texts are not a Jewish religious production; they are a product of the social experience that are intimately tied to situations of foreign domination. In other words, for the purposes of this study, apocalyptic narratives are not religious texts, but social texts.

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292 Smith (1978), 67-68.

293 Smith (1978), 86.
In our review of provincial territories we saw that no matter which province considered, each were attempting to understand their social role in an imperial context. The onomastic traditions or Galatia and Bithynia certainly attest to this, while the numismatic traditions in Judea demonstrate a reworking of civic myths to incorporate the new imperial order. Revelation is simply a literary version of this process of integration, and it is this realization of the fundamental connection between foreign domination and apocalypticism that obliges us to consider the colonial framework and how this environment shapes the social histories of those involved.

Though Smith is less explicit in his phrasing, the association of apocalypticism with “religious phenomena” is misleading since apocalypticism seems to be most closely attuned to the social and political developments of its time. This means that meaningful research into apocalyptic materials must address this component of apocalypticism instead of continuing to engage in comparisons based solely on the category of “religion” to be the guiding factor in assembling our comparisons. A postcolonial critique broadens our research on apocalyptic writings by considering issues of social and political power in the colonial context, and is therefore necessarily integral to truly serious research about so-called “religious” writings.

Rather than following the traditional approach of comparing ancient Judeo-Christian apocalypses with Revelation in hopes of finding genealogical connections in religious apocalypses, why not consider the description of apocalyptic offered by Smith alongside other less “religious” examples? There is no natural connection in these different materials that begs for them to be the subjects of comparison. “It is the scholar
who makes their cohabitation – their ‘sameness’ – possible, not ‘natural’ affinities or processes of history.\textsuperscript{294} The so-called “proximity” of these materials with one another, or the idea that the arbitrary category of religion or Christianity stipulates that these things must be compared with one another is, as Smith argues, a false proposition:

A comparison is a disciplined exaggeration in the service of knowledge. It lifts out and strongly marks certain features within difference as being of possible intellectual significance, expressed in the rhetoric of their being ‘like’ in some stipulated fashion. Comparison provides the means by which we ‘re-vision’ phenomena as our data in order to solve our theoretical problems.\textsuperscript{295}

In other words, efforts to understand Revelation cannot hold comparisons of first-century materials as better than comparisons with other texts, despite the lack of temporal proximity to our material. This means that in the quest to describe an apocalyptic text like Revelation, the comparisons the scholar chooses to make in the service of these goals are validated not by their being objectively better or more “natural” to compare, but by the usefulness of such a comparison in the service of knowledge. It is my assumption that the classification and categorization of Revelation as a Christian text is one that sets up the unnatural assumption that meaningful comparisons for the first-century apocalypse of John will necessarily evoke Jewish and Christian apocalypses of the ancient near east as relevant data for comparison. The unfortunate result from these comparisons is that we begin to think that the common thread amongst these texts is that they are “religious.” We find these so-called Jewish and Christian “apocalypses,” and we compare and contrast, tacitly participating in the reification of these writings as “religious.” In doing so, we

\textsuperscript{294} Smith (1990), 51.

\textsuperscript{295} Smith (1990), 52.
overlook the content of these writings and forget that “[s]uch common features…reflect similar points of tension in the social structure of the peoples among whom these stories circulated.” It is the shared social experience of those for whom apocalyptic texts signify in a meaningful and valuative way that needs to be the point of interest in our study, not the presumed “shared essence” that serves to collect and comprise the narrative category of apocalyptic.

Subscribing to a shared essence means that we deracinate texts like Revelation from their surrounding environs and mystify it; we call it special by labeling it “apocalyptic,” and put it in a box with other “apocalypses,” separating the text from its colonial context and from other contemporary expressions of Roman Imperialism in the first century. Subscribing to the shared social experience means taking into account the social, political histories of a given people that have contributed to the construction of their identities. The shared social history means that there is a value in looking at Revelation along side contemporaries such as the Batavians, or in researching onomastic traditions that demonstrate the internalization of Roman Imperialism. Ultimately, the shared social experience means that approaching these materials fully cognizant of their colonial context is of utmost importance. Considering how the colonial field of play has contributed to the construction of boundaries and epistemologies that fundamentally shape provinces living under Roman rule is integral to such studies.

If there is no essence that defines the data compared, then we are never beholden to our data which we consciously choose to compare since a “[c]omparison is never

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innocent but it is always interested.”297 It is with this view of comparison that we will move along in this descriptive endeavor to our final provocation.

5.5. **Tea Party discourse and the apocalyptic paradigm**298

Keeping the strictures of comparison in mind and being forthcoming in the completely *interested* upcoming comparison, considerations of the rhetorical performances of Revelation alongside the twenty-first century rhetoric of the Tea Party movement in the United States allow for some interesting insights to be made. Keeping Jonathan Z. Smith’s theory of apocalyptic in mind and exploring motifs of cessation of native kingship, insider-outsider language and moreover the strong desire to return to an idealized state of being, imagined in different capacities as a sort of “cosmic renewal,” the Tea Party exhibits characteristics similar to the apocalyptic discourses of Revelation.

The aim here is not to say that the discourses are the same, or that we are considering either text *in toto* against the other. Rather, these comparisons are selective in their material so that such selections might be brought together in hopes of clarifying our understanding of the apocalyptic narrative.

5.6. **Native kingship and the Tea Party paradigm**

While certainly not uniform in their conception, Tea Party rhetoric draws upon several different images in constructing their representation of past glorious rulers. In doing so, these representations collectively celebrate figures—like “the Founding Fathers” and more recent American politicians like Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan—not as social beings in an historical context, but as ahistorical figures that are directly

297 Lincoln (2012), 121.

298 My thanks Allan Wright, friend and colleague, who first suggested this interesting comparison.
accessible and have unchanging meanings that can address contemporary concerns and situations; in this way Tea Party rhetoric might best be understood as an exercise in “historical fundamentalism.”

To begin with, Tea Party rhetoric represents itself as strictly adhering to the principles that guided the Founding Fathers as they developed the “framework for America,” epitomized in documents such as the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and Bill of Rights. The concerns present in Tea Party rhetoric of the twenty-first century are completely analogous to the concerns that precipitated the American Revolution, and have thus contributed to the elevation of not only the founding figures of the Revolution, but of the documents, specifically the Constitution:

We are deeply rooted in the American traditions of individual freedom and constitutionally limited government. If it looks antiestablishment, that is because the political establishment has become completely and arrogantly dismissive of these timeless principles. And if that’s radicalism, sign us up. The club is already populated with names like Jefferson, Madison, Washington, Franklin, and (Samuel) Adams.

In Tea Party rhetoric, the figures of the Founding Fathers represent not simply real Americans, but an original, real America. This narrative acts as a sacred history and the producers of the narrative, figures like Dick Armey, in what they perceive to be the same position of the Founding Fathers who endured the heavy yoke of imperial domination.

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299 Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson (2012), The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism (Oxford University Press), 49.


from the British, seek to break the shackles of the unconstitutional big government today and “restore America to its prior greatness.”

Paralleled in their celebration of the Founding Fathers is an equal if not greater celebration of the Constitution of the United States, a document that represents the innermost kernel of the primordial, golden America. In the rhetoric surrounding the Constitution we find a document that represents the truest form of what America was, and should be today. “An American’s freedom is based on individual rights endowed by our Creator, secured by the Constitution…American wealth was not an accident but a direct result of our freedoms.” The image depicted by Dick Armey and Matt Kibbe, authors of *Give Us Liberty: A Tea Party Manifesto*, suggests that the Constitution was a document composed not by men in an historical context, but fashioned by (a Christian) God; in the same way that God created the heavens and the earth and all things that creep along it; that same creating hand took care in the crafting of the Constitution. Russell McCutcheon rightly identifies the mythological grounds that the Declaration of Independence and Constitution were founded on, contributing to the ahistorical aura surrounding these documents:

The opening of the Declaration[ , “we hold these truths to be self evident,”] effectively removes readers from the tug-and-pull of the contingent, historical world and places them in an abstract, ahistorical realm where such things as truths are obvious, enduring and self-evident. Through this rhetoric of self-evidence, then, the long European history of philosophical, political and social debate and development which eventually led to this document—and the nation-state founded upon it—is completely obscured, as if the

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302 Meckler and Martin (2012), 11.

Declaration, and later the U.S. Constitution as well, spontaneously arose from the ground fully formed.  

Amidst the multifarious applications of constitutional lore, Tea Partiers thoroughly reinforce the ahistorical nature of the founding documents that constitute America as an exceptional country. For Armey and Kibbe, it is hard not to view the founding of the United States as a “political miracle.” “Our founding principles are the right founding principles, as evidenced by the fact that America is, at the time of this writing, the most powerful and prosperous nation in the history of the world.”

If Tea Party rhetoric employs images of the Founding Fathers and Constitution that fulfill a sort of “myth of origins,” then the appearance of figures like Ronald Reagan and Barry Goldwater stand both as heroes of Tea Party ideology as well as remnants of a more recent era when these principles were last championed.

Skocpol and Williamson write that if you ask Tea Partiers when they had their first political experience, some younger people may mention the 2008 campaign of Ron Paul, but many more of them will likely cite the 1964 election that pitted incumbent President Lyndon Johnson against the Republican candidate Barry Goldwater. Dick Armey passionately narrates his experience with the 1964 Goldwater campaign as a suspension of his usual ambivalence toward the political sphere:

Never had I heard a political figure speak so passionately on freedom, the genius of the Founding Fathers, and our enduring values as a nation...[until

305 Armey and Kibbe (2010), 35.
307 Skocpol and Williamson (2012), 41.
this time] I almost never thought of politics. But Goldwater was different; and for the first time in my life I was excited and inspired to participate in the political process. 308

For Armey, as well as many others, Barry Goldwater was a tribune for the Tea Party cause who championed Libertarian slogans for limited government, fiscal responsibility and the preservation of personal liberties. 309

Similarly to Goldwater, Tea Party rhetoric calls upon the name of Ronald Reagan as a hero of a bygone era. “Reagan’s landslide victory in 1984 [was] the last victory of its kind in more than a quarter of a century.” 310 Furthermore, Reagan was seen to prove “that you could win as a Republican by boldly offering voters a positive vision for America based on the principles of lower taxes, less government, and more freedom.” 311

In the rhetoric of Tea Partiers, Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan represented conservative ideology at distinct points in American history. However, as was the case for the Founding Fathers and the Constitution, Goldwater and Reagan are not representative of actual people in history, but rather as concepts of an ideal state of nation, as “shining moments when the Republican Party embraced a national vision for America based on the principles of individual liberty and government restraint [reminding] us that there is hope.” 312

310 Rasmussen and Schoen (2010), 45.
311 Armey and Kibbe (2010), 129.
312 Armey and Kibbe (2010), 129.
While the Founding Fathers, Constitution, and political careers of Goldwater and Reagan act as storied origins and past glorious rulers in Tea Party rhetoric, the histories that get mythologized are glorified not solely because the past was so great, but also because the present is so “bad.” In their narratives the legendary political genius of Barry Goldwater and the epic narrative of the Reagan years are brought sharply into focus by virtue of the authoritarian and oppressive rule of Barack Obama and his henchmen (often personified as former Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi). After all, the past only looks so bright because the present is so dark.

Representations of Obama in Tea Party rhetoric frequently employ negative imagery from the conservative base that decry Obama and his administration as “Marxists” and “Czars” and sometimes actually personifying him as the devil.\textsuperscript{313} Among other allegations are accusations that he was not born in the United States,\textsuperscript{314} or the (arguably) less outlandish claim that Obama wants to “Europeanize” the United States.\textsuperscript{315}

Despite the disparate nature of the accusations and allegations leveled against Obama and his administration, one consistent theme amidst the noise of discontent remains: Obama is not one of us; he is someone/thing else. Ranging in tenor from him being the lord of the underworld to his support for (evil) social policies, the message shared among Tea Partiers is that Barack Obama is an outsider; he is a foreign ruler, an


\textsuperscript{314} An allegation that has spawned a movement known as “Birthers,” not to be confused with “Birchers” of the John Birch Society.

\textsuperscript{315} Armey and Kibbe (2010), 71, and Zernicke (2010), 95-96.
interloper. According to Kate Zernicke, author of *Boiling Mad: Inside Tea Party America*, the rhetoric surrounding Obama as an outsider touches on many different levels:

The son of an African father and white American mother, Obama is perceived by many Tea Partiers as a foreigner, an invader pretending to be an American, a fifth columnist. Obama’s past as a community organizer is taken as evidence that he works on behalf of the undeserving poor and wishes to mobilize government resources on their behalf. His academic achievements and social ties put him in league with the country’s intellectual elite, whose disdain feels very real to many Americans, and whose cosmopolitan leanings seem unpatriotic.316

For Tea Party rhetoric where conceptions of “us and them” are deeply embedded with issues of race, class, and the political/liberally educated elite, Barack Obama fulfills entirely too many characteristics of “the other.” Whether there is reminiscence about the golden age of the founding of America under figures like Washington, Jefferson, and Adams or a recollection of the paragon politics of Goldwater or Reagan, the fact remains that the histories and narratives recalled are done so because such stories are useful to some current cause. Skocpol and Williamson comment that

[p]olitical actors regularly invoke the past for reasons other than intellectual debate or verisimilitude. Invocations of the past are didactic and metaphorical. At the grass roots, the Tea Party is an effort at restoration…we can be sure that today’s Tea Partiers are fighting about the here and now—using references to the “true meaning” of the Constitution in their struggle to shape the nation’s future—rather than actually trying to return to any given moment in America’s past. They are doing what every political endeavor does: using history as a source of inspiration and social identity.317

5.7. Insiders and outsiders in the Tea Party Paradigm

316 Skocpol and Williamson (2012), 79.
317 Skocpol and Williamson (2012), 50.
It is not difficult to come across insider/outsider language in Tea Party discourse. While the line between the “us and them” is not always immediately clear, or who exactly “us” and “them” refers to in any given context is anything but formulaic, there is absolutely no shortage of this language in Tea Party rhetoric that serves to establish boundaries and systems of knowledge about the Tea Party and its enemies.

A prefatory description of the insider/outsider grouping might begin by characterizing the outsiders as those who have committed the most egregious crimes of fiscal irresponsibility that have contributed to the financial woes that have settled on the shoulders of Americans since 2008. Tea Party rhetoric argues that “[t]hose who screwed up must be allowed to fail, those who broke the law must go to jail, [and t]hose who live by the rules must be left alone to rebuild the nation.”

While citing “those who screwed up” as the outsiders of this American Paradigm hardly begins to narrow down the list of suspects, it does provide a clue for further investigation. Authors of Mad as Hell: How the Tea Party Movement is Fundamentally Remaking Our Two-Party System, Scott Rasmussen and Doug Schoen argue that the political elite are representative of the outsiders to the Tea Party American Paradigm, indicating that their leadership is responsible for the failed state of affairs in America: “[T]he political elite is shockingly out of touch with mainstream America.” For Rasmussen and Schoen, figures like Rahm Emanuel, Tim Geithner and Larry Summers are emblematic of “the political elite,” often citing their elite education and extensive

318 Zernicke (2010), 25.
319 Rasmussen and Schoen (2010), 89.
resumes as evidence to the fact.\(^{320}\) According to Rasmussen and Schoen, there exist many of these political elites on either side of the political field, and thus a description of “them” is characterized by a class of political elites who perpetuate the status quo by enriching themselves and perpetuating “the policies that have been disastrous to mainstream America”.\(^{321}\)

The political class stands alone, separate and divorced from every other American group; you’re either in the meritocratic elite, or you’re not; you’re either one of the influencers of opinion, one of the power brokers in Washington or Wall Street, one of the technocratic elite with Ivy League pedigree and a lifestyle comfortable and affluent, or you’re not.\(^{322}\)

There truly seems to be “two kinds of people in the world” for Rasmussen and Schoen, for while they cast a relatively small net for “them,” the argument that everyone else in America who isn’t a member of the political elite comprises the “us” portion is not without contending narratives. Furthermore, in Rasmussen and Schoen’s text, the political elite are intrinsically tied to the financial ills that plague America today, so while the net they cast seems to be small, it shares the characteristics of fiscal irresponsibility outlined by Kate Zernicke.

In their self-proclaimed Tea Party Manifesto *Give Us Liberty*, Dick Armey and Matt Kibbe possess very particular conceptions of “us and them” within their own distinctive Tea Party paradigms, and while they are reticent to offer explicit parameters for who comprises the insider camp, there is a distinctive message in their language that suggests not quite everyone outside the political elite is on our side:

\(^{320}\) Rasmussen and Schoen (2010), 89-91.

\(^{321}\) Rasmussen and Schoen (2010), 93.

\(^{322}\) Rasmussen and Schoen (2010), 108.
Many of us knew instinctually that the bailout was wrong. We understood that in order for capitalism to work we need to be able to not only keep the potential gains from the risks we take but also accept the losses that may come... Many of us had a neighbor or heard about someone who had been living too high on the hog for too long and were wondering why we were now supposed to pay for it... We got it—our instincts were right. Unfortunately, many of the 535 people we sent to Congress didn’t seem to get it. And they certainly haven’t accepted their responsibility for creating the problem.\footnote{Armey and Kibbe (2010), 38.}

While Armey and Kibbe certainly agree with Rasmussen and Schoen’s assertion that certain political elites fall into the outsider camp, they refer to ordinary citizens as those who acted irresponsibly or frivolously in the past and have contributed to the dire financial situation America finds itself in. Additionally, Armey and Kibbe offer a key descriptor for the insiders of the Tea Party when they say, “many of us knew \textit{instinctually} that the bailout was wrong.” This subtle provisionary clause in their description suggests that while many people were “living high on the hog,” true Tea Partiers were smarter than that and sensed that something was amiss. Founding members of the Tea Party Patriots Mark Meckler and Jenny Beth Martin echoed these sentiments that “true Tea Partiers” sensed trouble and acted accordingly: “Those of us in the Tea Party movement never bought into the government’s lies, because we know that it is not the role of an American government to seize private assets from the people, or to remove risk from a risk-based capitalist system, no matter what kind of ‘public blessing’ the government labels it.”\footnote{Meckler and Martin (2012), 37-38.}

For Meckler and Martin, as well as Armey and Kibbe, there exists a clear, albeit general, demarcation of those in the general public who knew something was not quite right, who never bought into their lies and thus find themselves collectively sectioned off from the
general American populace. In this sense Tea Party rhetoric has a lot in common with many other American narratives that have come to disagree with the direction of the political establishment since, as Skocpol and Williamson have suggested, “[p]olitics is about who we are—often in contradistinction to ‘them,’ to types of people that are not fully part of our imagined community. ‘We’ want our representatives in government to speak for ‘us,’ not cater inappropriately to ‘them.’”\textsuperscript{325}

It is not sufficient, therefore, to end the discussion of insider and outsider Tea Party discourse to Americans who knew by some special instinct that something was wrong with the current direction of the political establishment. The self-representations in Tea Party texts exist both in and around the historical structures of American politics, and thus can be described by reference to these preexisting structures.

While there is often a tendency in Tea Party discourse to describe their views as bipartisan, “across the isle” in its configuration, Rasmussen and Schoen have identified Tea Party supporters as being 60% male, 80% white and 77% conservative in political ideology, with an overwhelming majority reporting their support for Republican candidates in the 2010 Congressional elections.\textsuperscript{326} “Those who do not call themselves Republicans are almost never Democrats or middle-of-the-roaders. They may instead think of themselves as Ron Paul Libertarians, ‘Birchers’ (members of the John Birch Society), or some other sort of independent situated beyond the right edge of the GOP.”\textsuperscript{327} Unsurprisingly, it appears that the vast majority of Tea Partiers and Tea Party supporters

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Skocpol and Williamson (2012), 47.
\item Rasmussen and Schoen (2010), 157-158.
\item Skocpol and Williamson (2012), 28.
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have their political roots within the Republican party, and while the conservativism of the GOP is not as strong as members of the Tea Party would like, “[i]n 2010 many Tea Partiers chose the lesser of two evils and supported a slate of Republican candidates, many of whom had pledged allegiance to our core Tea Party values.”

Historical connections to the Republican Party did not necessarily translate into loyalty on the part of many Tea Partiers, who sought to “remake the Republican Party in the Tea Party’s image…” as the words of Tea Partier Philip Glass suggest, “[w]e want to fill every seat in the [Republican] party with essentially our people.”

Similar depictions of the mission of the Tea Party can be seen in Armey and Kibbe’s manifesto that calls for a “hostile takeover” of the Republican Party. The usual defenders of Tea Party principles (limited government, fiscal responsibility, and free markets) did not seem concerned at the economic crises facing America, so whatever affiliations Tea Partiers had to the Republican Party in the past, a new line was drawn between true conservative ideology and the GOP. In reference to participation in the tax march on September 12, 2009, Dick Armey and the Freedomworks organization “made support for TARP (troubled assets relief program) a disqualifier…No elected official or organization that had voted for or publicly supported the Bush/Obama/Pelosi/McCain bailouts would be included at the march.”

If the message was still unclear, Meckler and Martin assure members of the

328 Meckler and Martin (2012), 65.
329 Zernicke (2010), 104-106.
331 Armey and Kibbe (2010), 104.
House of Representatives and Senate that their political positions, regardless of party affiliation, are not safe:

Those who have voted for fiscally irresponsible budgets, resolutions, and policies should be particularly worried…To those members, though, we tell them that they still have a chance. It’s not too late for them to do the right thing. Restore fiscal responsibility, adhere to the Constitution, and embrace the free market, and we’ll be your biggest advocates. But if you don’t, this is what we will do to you…332

While the following passage is too long to quote in its entirety, Meckler and Martin enumerate the various ways in which the Tea Party Patriots are able to activate the constituencies of these representatives through direct mail, billboard advertising, and aggressive phone campaigns to call their members of Congress and let them know “what they’re doing wrong.”333

In Tea Party narratives, the mission of advocating Tea Party principles in American political space takes the appearance of an all-out battle. Zernicke writes that “Tea Partiers spoke of it as a battle not just of principle—plenty of people on the other side would have agreed it was that—but between righteousness and evil, between slavery and freedom.”334 Zernicke recalls an email sent out by Tea Party activist Jennifer Stefano to her candidates exhorting them to remain true to Tea Party principles as they face pressure from the GOP in the race for Republican nominations for the 2010 midterm elections. The email read:

THEY WILL SEEK TO INTIMIDATE, SMEAR AND DEFAME YOU. THEY WILL SEEK TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS BEING THE

332 Meckler and Martin (2012), 77-78.
333 Meckler and Martin (2012), 78-79.
334 Zernicke (2010), 127.
Stefano’s exhortation to prepare for what lies ahead is a common theme in Tea Party discourse. Reminiscent of their call for a hostile takeover of the Republican Party, Armey and Kibbe call on Tea Partiers to take America back.

Today the liberals who control Congress make even Bill Clinton look conservative by comparison and they are scaring Americans with their fiscal lasciviousness. This overreach is the stage upon which to build a revolt. We can take America back from special interests, leftist advocacy groups, and arrogant politicians.336

If Tea Party officials like Jenny Beth Martin and Mark Meckler of the Tea Party Patriots and Dick Armey and Matt Kibbe of Freedomworks have ideas about who comprises the insider/outsider groups of the Tea Party paradigm, Skocpol and Williamson suggest that the ground level (grassroots?) Tea Partiers present the insider/outsider dynamic as somewhat different in its composition:

The specific melodies vary, but the basic tune remains: Tea Party members establish themselves as worthy Americans in terms of the contributions they have made—and contrast themselves to other categories of people who have not worked to make their way in society and thus do not deserve tax payer funded support.337

Skocpol and Williamson suggest that many who became involved in the Tea Party seem to have a different conception of who “we” are in relation to “them.” This is not to say that they do not have hostile views toward the political elite, or have not voiced

335 Zernicke (2010), 184.
336 Armey and Kibbe (2010), 172.
337 Skocpol and Williamson (2012), 66.
strong disapproval of Barack Obama or Nancy Pelosi, but rather that their conception of
the insider/outsider paradigm is framed in a considerably different terms:

This moral social geography, rather than any abstract commitment to free-
market principles, underlies Tea Party fervor to slash or eliminate categories
of public benefits seen as going to unworthy people who are “freeloading”
on the public sector. For Tea Party people, it is illegitimate to use taxes and
public spending to redistribute wealth from productive taxpayers like
themselves to people who have not earned their way.338

The “freeeloaders” burdening the public sector certainly does not seem to narrow
the lens and pinpoint exactly who fits the bill as an outsider. Instead Skocpol and
Williamson found that within the classification of “freeeloaders” is a broad swath of the
American public that fit the bill as an “outsider.”

Race certainly plays a role in determining who fits the bill as an outsider among
Tea Partiers. Racial stereotypes and slurs certainly have their place among Tea Party
rallies, but there seems to be a concerted effort among Tea Party organizers to stem such
lapses. In their interviews with Tea Partiers, Skocpol and Williamson found that concerns
about such negative representations of the Tea Party were not uncommon. “At various
planning meetings, several Massachusetts Tea Party members raised concerns that
outsiders might “infiltrate” their protests with racist or otherwise inappropriate signs in
order to make local activists look bad.”339

More generally, concerns of freeloaders seem to revolve around three key themes
that most Tea Partiers draw upon: the burdensome illegal immigrants, overly entitled

338 Skocpol and Williamson (2012), 66.
339 Skocpol and Williamson (2012), 69.
young people, and the illegitimate political elite best signified by Barack Obama, who is seen as the greatest advocate and defender of “these people”:

[T]he current Tea Party distinction between freeloaders and hardworking taxpayers has ethnic, nativist, and generational undertones that distinguish it from a simple reiteration of the long-standing American creed. In Tea Party eyes, undeserving people are not simply defined by a tenuous attachment to the labor market or receipt of unearned government handouts. For Tea Partiers, deservingness is a cultural category, closely tied to certain racially and ethnically tinged assumptions about American society in the early twenty-first century. Tea Party resistance to giving more to categories of people deemed undeserving is more than just an argument about taxes and spending. It is a heartfelt cry about where they fear “their country” may be headed.340

These concerns often melt into a general message speaking of societal decline where “freeloading social groups, liberal politicians, bossy professionals, big government, and the mainstream media” are the architects of this modern American nightmare.341

Understanding the subjectivities of the insider/outsider discourse and the subjectivities offered therein often depends on the social location of the person you are speaking with. This seems to account for the adaptability and malleability of “the other” within the Tea Party paradigm. Media figures like Dick Armey or Jenny Beth Martin are often seen targeting government spending habits of politicians (often from either isle) essentialized in the Bush-Obama stimulus package, while many seem to have positive views—and even make use—of social programs like Social Security and Medicare. For example, Skocpol and Williamson write that “Two-thirds of [Tea Partiers] support increasing the payroll tax to sustain Social Security…Like other Americans, Tea Partiers

340 Skocpol and Williamson (2012), 74.

341 Skocpol and Williamson (2012), 75.
love the parts of government they recognize as offering legitimate benefits to citizens who have earned them.”

Understanding how the anti-government policy/spending language of Dick Armey and company translates to many Tea Partiers may have more to do with the representation of government spending and social policies with regard to its beneficiaries. The questions Armey and company pose to their listeners never draw upon their experiences with Medicare or Social Security or ask whether these policies and programs are good for Americans. Instead, their language often castigates “freeloaders” who would take Tea Partier’s hard earned money and enjoy services they have not earned. The question of who comprises “us and them” shifts, demonstrating the instability of the categories themselves. For all the variation in conceptions and classifications of “the other” in Tea Party rhetoric, the other remains consistently and securely located outside the Tea Party American Paradigm.

5.8. Cosmic renewal: the restoration of America in the Tea Party paradigm

The concept of cosmic renewal—or a “restoration of the nation” as it is commonly referred to in Tea Party rhetoric—as it relates to the Tea Party is closely related to the notion of a loss of native kingship. In the narrative we see the longing for the bygone era of the Founding Fathers, Barry Goldwater, and Ronald Reagan which are appended often times by a desire to see a reinstitution of these ideals and principles once championed by these figures. In order to fully explore the concept of cosmic renewal in Tea Party discourse, one must first understand how the Tea Party narratives construct the

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342 Skocpol and Williamson (2012), 62-63.
present state of affairs. Longing for cosmic renewal is logical (within the Tea Party paradigm) not because the renewed state will be so wonderful, but because the present state of affairs is so utterly horrible. They are living in degraded America; “their” America has been plunged into chaos.

As a prominent spokesperson for the Tea Party, Glenn Beck represented this sense of chaos during a broadcast in which he describes not simply the fiscal issues facing Americans, but the broader social evils that characterize this Dark Age. Zernicke writes:

The show opened with Beck narrating a round-the-world tour of global horrors: Islamic extremism, kidnappings on the Mexican border, soaring unemployment, high corporate taxes, [and] Somali pirates. Then he harked back to September 12, 2001, the day after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, when “for a short time we really promised ourselves that we would focus on the things that were important. Friends, family, the eternal principles that allowed America to become the beacon for the world.” The country, he said, needed to get back to that sense of purpose and unity.\textsuperscript{343}

The insertion of high corporate taxes and high unemployment amongst various other issues in the world signals to Beck’s audience the dark times that we live in. It is not simply the economic recession that has settled on the American economy, but a Dark Age that has plunged the once shining city on a hill into chaos. Moreover, Beck represents the longing to return to “friends, family, [and] the eternal principles that allowed America to become the beacon for the world.” Clearly Beck presents America as a product of social and political history; much like the mythologization of the founding figures, Beck represents America as sui generis and eternal in nature; suggesting the Tolkienian image

\textsuperscript{343} Zernicke (2010), 24.
of America having been forged in the fires of Mount Doom; America is a nation whose course was set by deity.

Similar to Beck, Rasmussen and Schoen write that the popularity of the Tea Party in American politics is due, in large part, to the “perceived upending of the world” and “the decline of American hegemony”; these factors among others, according to Rasmussen and Shoen, have contributed to an unprecedented crisis of confidence turning the lives and worldviews of Americans upside down.  

Adopting a less expansive view of the present age, Dick Armey and Matt Kibbe write that the recent economic downturn is indicative of the current dark times facing America. They declare the economic crisis to be a “fiscal time bomb” threatening to end the American way of life, and suggest that the “principles that this country was founded on [are] being eroded.” In Armey and Kibbe’s text, the recession coupled with government spending is driving the American currency into the toilet, and with it the global perception of America. As Skocpol and Williamson write, many Tea Partiers feel that the United States is headed for “a catastrophic default in the very near future—a prophesy of financial and societal Armageddon.”

Understanding how Tea Party narratives construct the present time helps contextualize the persistent discussion on the revitalization/restoration/renewal of America. The doctrine of American exceptionalism runs throughout Tea Party discourse;

344 Rasmussen and Schoen (2010), 53-54.
345 Armey and Kibbe (2010), 8, 12.
347 Skocpol and Williamson (2012), 55.
the notion that America is a blessing to all the world, or shining city on a hill serving as a beacon to the world are thoroughly embedded in the Tea Party mythic Paradigm.\textsuperscript{348}

Coupling American exceptionalism with the cosmic chaos that defines the present age, and constructing (an albeit unstable) insider/outsider discourse, the effort to restore America to a perceived previous glory becomes much more intelligible. The identity offered to Tea Partiers is one of being “true Americans”—they pay their taxes and some fought in wars—and they have had enough; “they viewed themselves as being on a crusade—saving the nation, restoring the “real” America.”\textsuperscript{349} Meckler and Martin of the Tea Party Patriots write that this is “a call to arms for those who remember how great America once was to stop what they’re doing, pay attention, and join the movement that will ultimately restore America to its place as the greatest country the world has ever seen.”\textsuperscript{350}

The process for revitalization is far from uniform and while many different ideas on what is entailed have been suggested, the general concept seems to be clear: a political takeover that will see the storied principles and policies of America championed by the Founding Fathers, Goldwater, and Reagan, restored to the center of American politics.

A microcosm of this renewal occurred on January 19, 2010 with the election of Republican Scott Brown to the United States Senate in Massachusetts, a seat that had previously been held Teddy Kennedy. “On January 18, we had gone to sleep in a country in which big-government politicians and Washington elites shouted over the voices of the

\textsuperscript{348} Meckler and Martin (2012), 182, and Zernicke (2010), 44.

\textsuperscript{349} Zernicke (2010), 54.

\textsuperscript{350} Meckler and Martin (2012), 15.
American public. On January 19, we awoke to a revitalized America.” Armey and Kibbe write that the election of Scott Brown to the United States Senate was not simply a political windfall; it was a sign that the restoration of their great nation is possible. In their text, Armey and Kibbe recall the story of an elderly woman who saw the election of Brown as more than a stride for Republicans in a former Democratic stronghold: “[I]n Scott Brown she saw more than just another Republican candidate…In him she saw the future of America, the future of freedom, and a return to sanity in Washington.”

While the microcosmic renewal of America represented by the victory of Scott Brown was a step in the right direction, Tea Party discourse maintains that the task of revitalizing America is far from complete. The citizens who hold true to the principles of the Tea Party still need to rise up, and, beginning with the Republican Party and then Congress, take back America from “The Man.” While there can be little mistake that “The Man” refers to the current administration of Barack Obama, it is clear that such an effort must be firmly rooted in the political realm, with a leader who can clean house and restore America to the principles described by Tea Partiers. In a prophetic proclamation, Joe Wierzbicki, a self-identified “grass roots organizer,” suggested that the Tea Party should not be hasty in anointing a leader, but somewhere between now (2010) and 2012 “is probably the period of time when you’ll find a big national leader that will emerge that the majority of the people in this movement will feel comfortable following.”

353 Armey and Kibbe (2010), 97.
354 Rasmussen and Schoen (2010), 152.
While few would doubt that the words of Wierzbicki have a prophetic aura about them (even including a reference to a “vague saviour-king”), there remains a reticence to proclaim a leader. In the absence of an ordained leader the message within Tea Party discourse remains fixated on the disorder and chaos that plagues America, along with the deep-seated desire to restore their country.

If much of the Tea Party literature has been dedicated to talking about the need for America to be restored, there have been far fewer narratives on what that restored America would look like. Presumably the renewed America would be fashioned on the principles of limited government, fiscal responsibility, and free markets, but clarification beyond these storied Tea Party principles is vague.

In discussion on the revitalization of America, Mark Meckler and Jenny Beth Martin claim that the restoration of America can be accomplished in what they have termed “the Forty-Year Plan,” which highlights America’s trouble “in five critical areas: economics, politics, education, the judiciary, and culture.” In what might serve as a brief summary, Meckler and Martin believe that America has suffered enormous damage in these key areas, and by employing the principles generally promoted in Tea Party rhetoric, America can be returned to its storied position as the lighthouse for the world through their ambitious Forty Year Plan:

What will the final plan look like? One thing we can tell you from experience is that it will be far better, and wiser, than anything that any one of us can imagine right now. When the creativity, ingenuity, and genius of the American people are unleashed, wonderful things happen. We Tea Partiers see evidence of this phenomenon every day. It is the reason that our

355 Meckler and Martin (2012), 25.
movement in less than three years has become one of the most potent political forces in American history.\textsuperscript{356}

It does not take much imagination to slightly revise the text of Meckler and Martin to read, “and I saw a new heaven and a new earth…” a vision of America restored by the principles of the Tea Party that speaks more to an apocalyptic vision than a concrete plan. As one might imagine, the streets of gold are simply too bright for either Meckler or Martin to describe, but the desire to see America remolded around the ideas and principles of the Tea Party echoes at the close of their book.

\textbf{5.9. Texts and performance: Revelation and the Tea Party}

The apocalyptic framework characterized by Jonathan Z. Smith certainly goes a long way in describing Revelation and the Tea Party, but the efficacy of such a description is incomplete at best if one does not also acknowledge the role of performance in both texts. Indeed, both examples are great at presenting us with insider/outside discourses, hegemonic domination by foreign interlopers, and even forms of cosmic renewal, but if attention is not paid to the performativity of these texts a critical element in their discourses is missed.

The similarities between Revelation and the Tea Party as performances may not initially appear as obvious. On the one hand Revelation is a first century text that has been read and commented on for two thousand years. The Tea Party, alternatively, is a recent phenomenon in American politics, and has various cultural manifestations in terms of books, public demonstrations, and various other depictions in the modern media.

Despite the potential incongruities that might be present in the question of performativity,

\textsuperscript{356} Meckler and Martin (2012), 204.
both Revelation and the Tea Party rely heavily on the performance of their respective discourses.

5.10. All the world’s a stage: performance in Revelation

It is difficult to ignore the role of spectacle in Revelation. One can debate the boundaries cast for insiders and outsiders, or speculate on the role of Rome as the dominant hegemonic force in the text, but before any critical faculties are deployed in the analysis of Revelation, we know first and foremost that it is a book about seeing. For the author, Revelation is a text utterly preoccupied with seeing. For the audience, both in the first century through to the contemporary era, Revelation is a text rife with visualizations; the entire text revolves around the notion of seeing things. Any novice interpreter looking at Revelation in its original Greek will undoubtedly need to quickly master the irregular aorist formation of ὁραω “I see,” καὶ εἰδον, “and I saw.” From the sounds of trumpets and the smell of sulfur, Revelation attacks the audience’s senses, but before the sounds, textures, smells and tastes, is the sight of it all.357 In Revelation “[t]he audience is thrust into a textual theater, an apocalyptic spectacle: invited to identify with characters in the narrative, they become “actors” playing roles under the direction of a panoptic divinity.”358 Revelation is above all a highly sensual text, deeply based in the sounds, smells, tastes, and above all else, sights.

Since discussing the social milieu of first century Asia Minor in the Roman Empire in chapter 3, it is necessary to address the spectacle of gender in the ancient Roman Empire and how it finds expression in Revelation. If Rome was the center of the empire

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357 Frilingos (2004), 40.
358 Frilingos (2004), 41.
(and the world), then the center of the empire found its expression in the figure of the Emperor himself. Darlene Juschka notes that as a model for masculinity, the emperor was seen as the ideal. Indeed, the prime example of masculinity can be “seen in his deification, being construed as the saviour and father of his people, the man who oversaw the military, financial, political, and social operations of the vast empire, and the one who brought the pax Romana.”

Of the many things seen in Revelation, it is clear that the masculine hegemony of Rome, epitomized in the figure of the emperor is paralleled in representations of masculinity through the establishment of the new Jerusalem, headed by the one seated on the throne.

Throughout the course of the text, Revelation is quick to identify Rome as an illegitimate form of rule and in doing so demonstrates what the author perceives to be legitimate in the form of the new Jerusalem.

If the figure of the one seated on the throne could be understood to parallel the Emperor, the role of the Lamb ἐστηκος ὡς ἐσφαγµενον “standing as though slaughtered” seems to be somewhat counterintuitive to the project of setting up an alternative masculine hegemony. The very idea of the Lamb appearing to have been slain, in other words, appearing to have been penetrated, seems to suggest the feminization of one of the leading characters in Revelation. Proper Roman masculinity was determined in part by being the one who enacted the insertion or penetration, in other words, by being the “penetrator,” but also by ensuring that, as a proper masculine figure, one was not penetrated by anyone/thing.

Although appearing to have been slaughtered, we might

359 Darlene Juschka (2009), Political Bodies/Body Politic: The Semiotics of Gender (Equinox: London and Oakville), 137.

360 Frilingos (2004), 75.

361 Juschka (2009), 144.
not be too hasty in classifying the Lamb as being feminized alone. Instead, the figure of the gladiator in ancient Rome might be able to bestow additional intelligibility to the spectacle of this character in Revelation.

In ancient Rome, the gladiator was certainly not the pinnacle of masculinity like the Emperor. Instead, he was more of a liminal figure who was both inside and outside of society, occupying an interstitial space between freedom and slavery.\(^{362}\) Being enslaved to the arena certainly meant a loss of self and a loss of masculinity to a certain degree, but the status of “slave to the arena” is tempered by the possibility of reclaiming one’s freedom—one’s selfhood—through combat and survival in the arena.\(^{363}\) Slavery/freedom is not the only binary applicable to the gladiator. In the arena, the gladiator is also a soldier, and despite being condemned to the arena, has the chance to redeem himself in via the soldier’s claim to masculinity.\(^{364}\) In this way the role of the gladiator as potential penetrator/penetrated circumscribes him to the realm of uncertainty, with redemption and condemnation waiting in the wings.

There is certainly a temptation to read the character of the Lamb as a symbolic reformulation of masculinity in Revelation, placing “passive resistance to authority” on a pedestal in the Apocalypse. However, this quest to see a reformulation of the semiotics of gender by turning traditional notions of masculinity on end resists the integration of Revelation with the Greco-Roman social milieu from which it emerged.\(^{365}\) Instead of

\(^{362}\) Juschka (2009), 141.

\(^{363}\) Juschka (2009), 142.

\(^{364}\) Juschka (2009), 146.

\(^{365}\) Frilingos (2004), 78.
abandoning the quest for historical intelligibility, why not consider the spectacle of the Lamb next to the spectacle of the gladiator? For Frilingos, there has been entirely too much focus on the body of the Lamb in Revelation. The mention of the Lamb “standing as though slaughtered” is the climax of narration in terms of the Lamb being the object of the gaze in Revelation. From here on out, the focus of the Lamb in the narrative is one where the Lamb is the bearer of the gaze, and no longer the object.\textsuperscript{366} As the narrative progresses, the Lamb is signaled as the one presiding over the punishment of the people, “while the tortured bodies writhe unobstructed before the audience.”\textsuperscript{367} The final episode of judgment with the Lamb at the helm occurs in chapter 14 where the enemies of the Lamb are thoroughly defeated in a gruesome spectacle of suffering. The battle that ensues between chapter 5 and chapter 14 culminates in the victory of the Lamb, and a restoration of its masculinity via the battles in “the arena.”

The audience sees the Lamb focus its gaze on those who suffer fiery torments: “and the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever” (Rev. 14:9-10). After studying the Lamb’s example, the audience is then able to view the suffering themselves: they witness the rape of Babylon (Rev. 17-18); they watch as the armies of the beast are killed and their flesh fed to the birds (Rev. 19:20-21); and they are spectators when the beast is “tormented day and night” (Rev. 20:10) and when the smoke of the burning Rome “goes up forever and ever” (Rev. 19:3).\textsuperscript{368}

Functioning similarly to the gladiatorial games, the spectacle of destruction in Revelation brought about by the Lamb who opened the seven seals which culminated in death and destruction is the focus of the narrative in these chapters. Revelation—like the

\textsuperscript{366} Frilingos (2004), 81
\textsuperscript{367} Frilingos (2004), 81.
\textsuperscript{368} Frilingos (2004), 88.
gladiatorial games—is a spectacle meant to be seen, and the characters each have their part to play in the arena. Much like the gladiator, the Lamb is an active agent in the arena, opening seals and bringing forth suffering to various parts of the world. “This excessive male sexuality, although problematic when performed outside the amphitheatre, when performed in the arena acted as ritual display of the potential power of masculinity.  

In Revelation, the Shakespearean adage, “all the world’s a stage” is certainly appropriate. It is a narrative concerned first and foremost with seeing; from the chaos and destruction, players either being destroyed or engaged in the destruction are encased in the narrative of Revelation as a spectacle.

5.11. Performing Americana: the Tea Party

Spectacles performed by Tea Partiers may not indulge in dramatic representations in the same way as Revelation, but this does not mean that performance is not a part of their discourse. The fact remains that while the Tea Party utilizes the aforementioned apocalyptic themes, they engage these themes through an array of spectacles that reflect the dominant ideologies of their movement.

From the outset, the Tea Party rhetoric seeks to engage in a spectacle of “Americanness.” Central to the Tea Party cause has been the establishment the principles of the movement as being “quintessentially American.” The very name “Tea Party” is a testament to this end. Short of calling themselves “The American Party,” Tea Partiers draw upon the Boston Tea Party of 1773 in an effort to perform “Americans for America.” The name “Tea Party” is arguably the most potent sign of the way the Tea

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369 Juschka (2009), 148.
Party discourse attempts to signify themselves as party of the “real America,” but it is certainly not the only way.

Although previously described in this analysis, the role of the Founding Fathers is central to Tea Party ideology. While figures like Washington, Adams, Jefferson and many others are central to constructing their myth of origins, they also serve an important role in the “spectacle” that speaks “Tea Party.” For Kate Zernicke, understanding the role of Revolutionary America in the Tea Party agenda helped to clarify the oft seen performance at Tea Party rallies:

This explained why Tea Partiers donned the hats of the minutemen who mustered in Lexington and Concord in 1775 and paraded the yellow “Don’t Tread on Me” flags that Christopher Gadsden carried to the Second Continental Congress that same year. It explained the Revolutionary War reenactors giving the blessings at the start of Tea Party rallies, and the T-shirts the Tea Partiers wore quoting Thomas Paine, who said, “It is the duty of every patriot to protect his country from his government.”…to the Tea Partiers, the Revolutionary War was more than a gimmick, and more than a metaphor. It was a frame of mind. They saw themselves the way they saw the founders, as liberty-loving people rebelling against a distant and increasingly overbearing government.370

In Tea Party rhetoric the founders are not a parody; they see in the founders an analogue to themselves, and the cheers “Huzzah! Huzzah! HUZZAH!” frequently used among Tea Partiers at a California rally signify this association.371 Mark Meckler and Jenny Beth Martin’s claim that Tea Partiers walk in the shoes of the founders is evidence of this vision of carrying on the mission of 200+ year-old American politicians.372

370 Zernicke (2010), 66.
371 Zernicke (2010), 94.
Perhaps one of the most poignant images of Tea Party ideology comes in the form of a painting by Jon McNaughton:

In the painting, Jesus Christ is shown holding up a copy of the United States Constitution, while American historical figures from Abigail Adams to Ronald Reagan stand admiringly behind him. The crowd in the foreground is divided into two groups. On Christ’s right, people including a Marine, a farmer, and the mother of a disabled child look admiringly towards the Constitution and Savior. A college student is shown holding a copy of *Five Thousand Year Leap*. On the left of Jesus, however, one finds a less pious crowd, with faces turned away from Jesus and the Constitution. These figures include a liberal news reporter, a politician talking on his cellphone, a smug professor carrying *The Origin of Species*, and, dimly visible in the background, Satan.\(^{373}\)

There is hardly enough time to explore every way this painting exhibits Tea Party ideology. While McNaughton himself is not a Tea Party Activist, his painting has resonated heavily with Tea Partiers.\(^{374}\) The basic signs and symbols of the Tea Party are present, from the endorsement of the Constitution as a sacred text by Jesus, to the representations of founding figures like Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Franklin, and others, McNaughton’s painting is a voracious image of Tea Party ideology.\(^{375}\)

While scholars like Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson have rightly identified the ahistorical role of the founding figures and politicians like Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan, they have failed to address more directly the specific roles these figures play in Tea Party narratives: these figures represent myths and sign-symbols of Tea Party ideology. “Because myth and sign-symbol operate a-historically, in other words, their historicity operates abstractly and has been deracinated, they can be used to signify in the

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\(^{373}\) Skocpol and Williamson (2012), 52.

\(^{374}\) Skocpol and Williamson (2012), 52.

\(^{375}\) For the sake of time attention must be paid to his use of the founding figures.
current socio-historical field.”\textsuperscript{376} Figures like the founders and Ronald Reagan become myths and sign symbols in the tandem process of abstracting their histories while cutting them from their contingent, social and historical contexts. “This allows myth and sign-symbol to draw signification from the past, but a past that has been reconceptualized, thereby allowing the myth and sign-symbol to signify meaningfully in the present.”\textsuperscript{377}

To say that Tea Partiers mythologize the founders, as well as figures like Goldwater and Reagan is not simply to say that they are completely removed from their histories. Instead, their value as myths and sign-symbols is derived from their individual socio-historical contexts. What occurs in the Tea Party discourse is an abstraction of the social histories to the point where—to use Juschka’s term—“the metaphysical history” (the history that recalls the structural narrative without paying attention to the social, contextual history) becomes the only history that matters/is acknowledged.\textsuperscript{378} In this way figures like John Adams, Barry Goldwater, and Ronald Reagan do not operate as figures bogged down in their gritty historical contexts, but as trans-historical Americans hop scotching their way through the Tea Party’s American narrative.

George Washington no longer belongs solely to his idiosyncratic history as a general in the American Revolutionary War; as a myth and sign-symbol of the Tea Party he, along with the other founders, becomes the Revolutionary \textit{par excellence}. The transition may seem subtle, but in the Tea Party discourse figures like Washington transition from the past tense to the present; from statements like “Washington fought as a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{376}] Juschka (2009), 149.
\item[\textsuperscript{377}] Juschka (2009), 149.
\item[\textsuperscript{378}] Juschka (2009), 149-150.
\end{footnotes}
revolutionary,” to “Washington fights as we fight.” This is certainly the message received in Jon McNaughton’s painting, *In God We Trust*. In it a panoply of Americana stands slightly behind Jesus, thoroughly endorsing a message dear to the Tea Party: we fight both for and with (arm in arm) the America that has been lost; the righteous America that we seek to restore.\(^{379}\)

Understanding how the Tea Party engages in making myths and sign-symbols out of figures like the founders and others illustrates the performative quality in their discourse largely because, as Russell McCutcheon has suggested, myths are best thought of as active processes akin to verbs.\(^{380}\) “[W]e can say that myth is the vehicle whereby any variety of possible social charters is rendered exemplary, authoritative, singular, unique, as something that cannot be imagined differently.”\(^{381}\) Whether it is by engaging in historical reenactments or simply calling on the name Barry Goldwater as the “tribune of the movement,” these people serve to “perform America” as imagined in Tea Party rhetoric: what America was (via the metaphysical histories of these people), what America is (in these dark chaotic times), and what America needs to become (by way of cosmic renewal).

### 5.12. Data in redescription: the future of Revelation and the Tea Party

There can be no doubt that Revelation fits well within the category of apocalypse. As a text that fulfills a number of the requirements set forth by John Collins and others of

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\(^{379}\) There is so much more that could be explored here, time permitting. Themes of race and gender being only a few. Jon McNaughton’s representation of Tea Party ideology connects with a very particular Christian, Protestant, white, anglo worldview.


\(^{381}\) McCutcheon (2000), 200.
the apocalypse group (visions, other worldly journeys, heavenly mediators, judgment etc.), Revelation serves as a near perfect example, fitting well alongside other apocalyptic writings like 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra and many others. In similar fashion, the contemporary discourse of the Tea Party has been subject to a similar, though not identical categorization: political fanaticism. In other words, it is simple, and maybe even convenient, when one hears Tea Partiers railing on about the illegitimate birth of Barack Obama or the “Marxist social policies” embedded in his health care reform, to chalk it up to people acting crazy or irrational. In many ways the classification and categorization of Tea Partiers as political fanatics is the same as classifying Revelation as an apocalypse. In both cases, there are continuities between the phenomena of interest and other examples.

Both Revelation and the Apocalypse of Paul share the theme of cosmic transformation. Similarly, the disdain that Tea Partier’s harbor for any and all things socialist about the Obama administration has continuities with McCarthy hearings in the 1950s. In both cases the categorization is based essentially on appearances; the fact that Revelation contains the theme of cosmic transformation in common with something else does not say anything interesting about Revelation in and of itself. Similarly, the identification of the Tea Party as being anti-socialist does not help to clarify the Tea Party beyond simply stating a fact. To pursue these principles of categorization is to develop a collection of data that is incapable of saying anything other than that they hold a given collection of traits in common, and, perhaps more dangerously, it is to base our principles

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382 See Collins (1979).
of classification and categorization on the presumption that these phenomena share some essential trait(s), and not a shared social experience.

The danger the category apocalypse poses is a subtle one, but one with serious implications nonetheless. While the study and comparison of literatures restricted to the texts themselves can produce interesting outcomes, there are two outcomes of potential concern for such an endeavor. First, it relegates the texts concerned to the category of apocalypse and effectively silences them. From here, questions like “what’s up with all the destruction in Revelation?” or “what is with all the bizarre images in this strange text?” all become answerable to the categorical imposition—it is an apocalypse. Second, it perpetuates the false ontological assumption that there is something innate and essentially apocalypse-like about these texts. When Smith suggested that apocalypses represented paradigms for typological ends his argument was not built on the assumption that there was something sui generis about an apocalypse.383 Instead, by emphasizing the context of foreign domination Smith was suggesting that an apocalypse was a way of thinking about a social situation. In this model people do not create apocalypses, they create texts by writing apocalyptically.

Within this context the framework provided by colonialism, or, more generally, foreign domination, is indispensable for coming to terms with the social situations from which these phenomena emerge. The initial perception of the Tea Party and Revelation might suggest that they are leagues apart, but in this case it is not the obvious differences we are interested in. Both Revelation and the Tea Party are utterly consumed by what

383 Smith (1978), 80.
they perceive of as a genuine foreign interloper that has the run of the land, and in both cases this perception is mitigated by a vague understanding of a rightful ruler. In Revelation the context is Asia Minor, where Jews/Jewish Christians are but one among a variety of peoples struggling to understand their identity in Hellenistic environment. In the Tea Party we see a virtually identical iteration of colonial domination in the form of immigrants, the political elite, and the youth of today, all of whom are fundamentally out of touch or simply against “us Americans.” In both examples there is a clear message of who “we” are set against a backdrop of who “they” are. Moreover there is an explicit knowledge of who sits at the helm of this oppression, be it Rome or Obama.

Both Revelation and the Tea Party are often interpreted as examples of people who have “lost it.” Texts that rail on about seven-headed dragons or American presidents who are communist overlords could easily be interpreted this way. What is clear from such a comparison that seeks to take into account the complex set of social relationships in situations of real and perceived foreign domination is that both examples represent the calculated concerns of people facing situations where it is necessary to reinterpret their identities in light of new social and political circumstances. From this vantage colonial and postcolonial frameworks provide the theoretical footholds necessary to critique not only the social environments of the Tea Party and Revelation, but the structure and organization within these entities in an effort to better understand their respective discourses.

When we see a passage where a lamb (appearing to have been slain) is opening a scroll that enacts mass destruction, or when we hear Rush Limbaugh rail on about the
Marxist Czar that is Obama, it is crucial to resist the urge to call this stuff weird, and then put it some pre-ordained box, whether it is labeled “apocalypse” or “political fanaticism,” because either classification closes off our data for further consideration. Instead, we need to look at this material as a genuine expression of social formations and their shifting and negotiated boundaries. However tempting it may be to categorize the seven headed dragons and militaristic imagery of Dick Armey and Matt Kibbe as the ravings of crazy people, it is imperative to understand that these instances represent the meaningful discourses of a given people negotiating their identities in particular points in time and under particular social, political, and historical circumstances. To neglect these principles going forward is to resign from the position of historian of religions, and take up the much less desirable post as curator of religions.

5.13. Conclusion: tenable futures for the study of religion

Jonathan Z. Smith’s description of apocalyptic as “wisdom literature in the absence of a royal court and patron” went a long way in establishing a meaningful framework for analyzing apocalypticism. Smith presented the apocalyptic not as a motley catalogue of traits, but as a paradigm used for typological ends.384 In “Wisdom and Apocalyptic,” Smith sought to analyze apocalyptic literatures not in an effort to develop a system of classifications based on traits in the writings, but to look at these texts in “combination with their underlying social structure[s].”385 What he found was that within these discourses were elements of hegemonic domination in the form of colonialism, strong presence of insider/outsider language, and also the desire of cosmic renewal.

384 Smith (1978), 80.
385 Smith (1978), 68.
In his analysis of the Gospel of Mark, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins*, Burton Mack acknowledges the significance of the aforementioned tripartite discourse not simply in terms of apocalyptic discourse, but its significance in terms of social formation.

The Markan legacy is a myth of innocence that separates those who belong to the righteous kingdom within from those without. The boundaries, however, are not at all static. The borders shift as conflicts arise both within and without…Judgments fall to support the righteous cause as justified and the recalcitrant other as wrong…If all else fails, both martyrdom and the destruction of the wicked can be imagined as the means for vindicating the cause and trusting in the power of God to resurrect a new creation from the ashes.\(^{386}\)

For Mack, the righteous kingdom is a kingdom that has a legitimate ruler at its helm; its righteousness is derived not only from its legitimacy of kingship, but also from its notion of order of the cosmos, experienced most explicitly through the division of boundaries between who is with us, and who is not. But this distinction, as Mack so cleverly observes, is not a static, one-time classification that stipulates sides; the identification of insiders and outsiders is an ongoing system of classification that has to adapt to new social situations, on either sides of the imagined fence, with judgments descending in the name of truth or righteousness; judgments that are perpetually in the process of making the distinctions of who is set apart, and who is not.

In both Revelation and the Tea Party rhetoric there are attempts to define who is with us, and who is not. Both examples work toward establishing both the identities within, and identities of the “other,” the enemy. At the forefront of their descriptions

exists the ultimate “other,” that so epitomizes the other because of its position of domination—foreign domination. But like Mack’s description of shifting boundaries, descriptions of insiders and outsiders have an ebb and flow in both Revelation and the Tea Party.

Titles meant to capture the spectacle of this “other” are certainly present in either discourse, whether they are epithets like “Babylon the destroyer,” and a “beast with ten horns and seven heads,” or “Marxists” and “Czars.” The restoration of a restored, new community is certainly a defining characteristic of both the Apocalypse and the Tea Party. Whether it is explicitly a renewed cosmos, replete with a new heaven, earth and Jerusalem, or simply a renewed America, the theme of purging the old, chaotic realm held by illegitimate foreign rulers and restoring it to some primordial ideal state dominates the apocalyptic discourse of both Revelation and Tea Party rhetoric. Whether it is explicitly a renewed cosmos, replete with a new heaven, earth, and Jerusalem, or simply a renewed America, the theme of purging the old, chaotic realm held by illegitimate foreign rulers and restoring it to some primordial ideal state dominates the apocalyptic discourses of both Revelation and the Tea Party.

At this point, the question of comparison is immediately relevant. The work done by Mack to describe the earliest history of the Gospel of Mark is an extremely ambitious endeavor, and while the results may provide us with interesting conclusions about the first gospel, it seems that we are still left to consider the Gospel of Mark in the greater context of religion and Christianity.
The relevance of a comparison between the texts of Revelation and the rhetoric of a modern American political movement such as the Tea Party comes from a desire to see both texts as distinct products of human socialization. In the case of first century Jewish and Christian apocalypses, these documents were typically compared with other Jewish and Christian apocalypses because such classifications and categorizations seemed to make sense. We should read Revelation along side 1 Enoch and 4 Ezras because these are religious writings supposedly concerned with similar things: the end of the world. But the fact that these comparisons were attempted in the first place is a result of a much broader category that is orchestrating things from the sidelines—a category that even someone like Jonathan Z. Smith, who has furthered our understanding of apocalyptic by situating it as a social phenomenon, is beholden to: religion. On the subject of “religion,” William Arnal and Russell McCutcheon argue that

at least in practice, the invocation of “religion” actually serves to deny the comprehensibility of a given human phenomenon; it mystifies the behavior in question, sets it aside in its own distinct sphere, and directs our attention away from the real world of lived human activity. “Religion” is what we call something we do not understand, how we categorize social or cultural forms that do not appear to refer to ordinary or rational processes: it is our way of saying that a practice, behavior, or belief cannot be made sense of, and therefore that we need not try.  

Beyond denying the comprehensibility of such phenomena, the category of religion sets up a distinct sphere that suggests that further intelligibility of a given phenomenon can only really be gained by looking at other phenomena that have been gathered in the same sphere. In terms of the apocalyptic text, the mystification of a text like Revelation is

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extremely relevant. All sorts of bizarre things are happening in this text, and the classification of it as “religious writing” stamps it with a “free pass” in terms of intelligibility. Moreover, comparing it with other religious apocalypses only serves to strengthen the boundaries placed around these already-mystified phenomena.

Reading Revelation alongside Tea Party rhetoric is therefore an outright insistence that the materials we look at in religious studies be studied social creations. If I am to be as forthcoming as possible, comparing ancient apocalypses alongside one another may prove to be a meritorious endeavor for religion’s sake, but this sort of comparison is also a foremost vehicle for the reification and separation of apocalyptic texts into unique categories. By looking at Revelation and the Tea Party together we can attempt to remove the “protective cloak provided by the idea of religion” and in this way reintroduce these materials not as arcane examples of religious writings, but as examples of people thinking and acting in similar ways.\(^{388}\) In this way we might hope to bring the conversation in Biblical Studies and Religious Studies to the Humanities at large.

Jonathan Z. Smith has taken great steps in offering a social and historical description of apocalyptic by way of his comparisons with Wisdom literatures. By stressing the importance of situating apocalyptic narratives in a context of foreign domination, Smith established apocalyptic in space and time in a way that few have done before. Alternatively, there are also aspects of Smith’s work that have done a disservice to the historical inquiry of apocalypticism. While the description of apocalyptic proffered by Smith offers interesting ways of conceiving the genre of apocalyptic, his relentless

\(^{388}\) Arnal and McCutcheon (2013), 149.
comparisons of exclusively “religious” materials impedes the way we can understand apocalyptic materials.

The enterprise of comparison plays an enormous role as we continue to investigate first century writings like Revelation. It is crucial, therefore, that when comparisons of this sort are undertaken that they be executed with full cognizance that the materials we select for the purposes of comparison are selected not on their apparent “natural” appearance as datum that are most appropriate, but rather, that they be selected because such comparisons might be best suited to stimulate interest, or allow us to reimagine our subject matter in ways new and different ways. In this way comparisons that seek to account for the relationship between Revelation and other Judeo-Christian apocalypses (inside/outside the canon) often reify these materials as principally religious texts, and obscure them as phenomena that should otherwise be understood as examples of people “doing things that other people, in other social and political contexts, also do.” These sorts of comparisons offer no alternative view of the future except to suggest that we will continue to look at these materials with the same lens, perhaps even the same eyes that we always have used. Therefore, if there is hope in thinking differently about our materials we will trade our former comparisons that sought to gather up materials that appear similar for comparisons that appear to be different, because “‘difference’ invites negotiation and intellection.”  

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