

## Review of

**R. S. Sugirtharajah**  
**Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice**  
 (Chidester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 211 pp.

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What is the need for another introduction to postcolonial biblical criticism? Didn't Sugirtharajah publish the highly acclaimed *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford 2002) almost a decade ago? The answers to these questions are simple: postcolonial biblical criticism keeps on developing.

This text begins with an introductory chapter on postcolonial theory and concludes with an afterword that discusses the future of postcolonial biblical criticism. It charts the development of the field, criticizes Orientalist reading practices, and offers helpful reading strategies. It includes a chapter by Ralph Broadbent summarizing the foundational texts in postcolonial biblical criticism.

On the back cover, Stephen D. Moore says the book is accessible to novices, but "old hands will also learn enormously from it." I couldn't agree more.

The first chapter offers an updated development of the postcolonial condition. In the past, postcolonial was based on what Gayatri Spivak has called a "South Asian model." But today's Empire is *decentered* and *detrterritorialized* (Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri) and different from the previous colonial period. I detect urgency in the book to address economic inequity brought by globalization. Sugirtharajah said, in the early stage, postcolonial critics focused on political independence of former colonies. Then attention moved onto the dislocation and displacement of migrants and diasporans. Today, postcolonialism must address global hunger and the plight of rural poor and peasants (20). In this way, the book wants to respond constructively to the persistent Marxist critiques of postcolonial biblical criticism by David Jobling, Roland Boer, and Gerald West.

I was struck by Sugirtharajah's suggestion that biblical studies be considered an essential component of Oriental studies. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said already indicted the philological work of Ernest Renan, a major contributor to the historical quest of Jesus in the nineteenth century (author of *Vie de Jésus*, 1863). Placing biblical studies within the parameters of Oriental Studies allowed us to distinctly see how Orientalist archetypes have been reactivated in social-scientific approaches to biblical studies. Sugirtharajah denounced the Orientalist construction of the "Mediterranean" in the works of John Pilch and Bruce Malina. The use of cultural anthropology in biblical studies has created the binary of "us" versus "them," and gives further support to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Said's contrapuntal reading has been well known in postcolonial criticism. In this book, Sugirtharajah insightfully uses Said's exposition of "late style" to discuss the writings of Paul and John. Said discusses the two contrasting late styles found in artists and thinkers during the twilight of their creative careers. One is wisdom, serenity, and harmony. The other fascinates Said for its display of "intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction." In music (Said was an accomplished pianist and music critic), Beethoven, Richard Strauss, and Mozart's "Cosi fan tutte" demonstrated this late style.

Sugirtharajah said Paul's Romans represents the first late style. According to Acts, he was a troublemaker and arrested for resisting Roman authorities numerous times. But in Romans, he became mellow and told his followers to submit to the authorities (Rom. 13). John's Book of Revelation represents the other late style, if John is taken to be the same author of the Fourth Gospel. The Book of Revelation is uncompromising in its anti-imperial stance, in sharp contrast to the apolitical nature of the Gospel of John.

The volume addresses the issue that male postcolonial biblical critics have not paid attention to feminist issues. Broadbent's chapter includes a section on "postcolonialism and feminism" (83-86). Sugirtharajah points his readers to resources on mutual criticism between feminists and postcolonial critics (19-20), criticizes the misogyny in the Book of Revelation (161), and challenges the use of gender stereotypes in the construction of the Mediterranean (107-108). These are good attempts – but much more can be said.

The contribution of queer studies to postcolonial criticism is glaringly missing in the book. The leading queer theorist Judith Butler has written on war, Zionism, and American imperialism. Marcella Althaus-Reid's work and some of the chapters in *The Queer Bible Commentary* include analyses of imperial power. Contrary to Sugirtharajah's comment that the Song of Songs falls outside the concerns of postcolonialism (53), Christopher King's reading of the Song in *The Queer Bible Commentary* shows that transgressive love prefers the outsider. This has implications for the construction of the "other," an issue discussed throughout Sugirtharajah's book. The intersection between postcolonialism and queer studies has been broached in other fields and ought to be included in discussing the future of postcolonial biblical criticism.

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