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Reading the New Testament after the Cultural Studies Turn

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ABBREVIATIONS

Primary Sources

4 Regn.	Dio Chrysostom, *De regno iv* (*Or.* 4)
A.J.	Josephus, *Antiquitates judaicae*
Amat.	Plato, *Amatores*
Ant. rom.	Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates romanae*
B.J.	Josephus, *Bellum judaicum*
Doctr. chr.	Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*
Fact.	Valerius Maximus, *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*
Fin.	Cicero, *De finibus*
Flacc.	Philo, *In Flaccum*
Flor.	Stobaeus, *Florilegium*
Gal.	Julian, *Contra Galilaeos*
Hist.	Polybius, *Historiae*
Ios.	Philo, *De Iosepho*
Leg.	Cicero, *De legibus*
Off.	Cicero, *De officiis*
Pol.	Aristotle, *Politica*

Secondary Sources

ABR	*Australian Biblical Review*
AcBib	Academia Biblica
AJBI	*Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute*
AYB	Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AugStud	*Augustinian Studies*
AYBRL	Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*

BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
Bib	*Biblica*
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BibInt	Biblical interpretation Series
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
BW	Bible and Women
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CurBR	*Currents in Biblical Research*
CurTM	*Currents in Theology and Mission*
DDD	Toorn, Karel van der, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, eds. *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
EC	*Early Christianity*
ECL	Early Christianity and Its Literature
EstEcl	*Estudios eclesiásticos*
ETL	*Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
GPBS	Global Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship
HvTSt	*Hervormde Teologiese Studies* (*HTS Teologiese Studies/HTS Theological Studies*)
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JFSR	*Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*
JRE	*Journal of Religious Ethics*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LS	*Louvain Studies*
Neot	*Neotestamentica*
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NTL	New Testament Library

NTS	*New Testament Studies*
PRSt	*Perspectives in Religious Studies*
PzB	*Protokolle zur Bibel*
RAC	Klauser, Theodor, et al., eds. *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum: Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt*. Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–.
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
ResQ	*Restoration Quarterly*
RevExp	*Review and Expositor*
RevistB	*Revista bíblica*
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLTT	Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SEÅ	*Svensk exegetisk årsbok*
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SR	*Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses*
TCS	Text-Critical Studies
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TS	*Theological Studies*
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZKT	*Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*
ZTK	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

1
NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRITIQUE

> How is it possible that the canon of thought in all the disciplines of the social sciences and humanities in the Westernized university is based on the knowledge produced by a few men from five countries in Western Europe (Italy, France, England, Germany and the USA [*sic*])? How is it possible that men from these five countries achieved such an epistemic privilege to the point that their knowledge today is considered superior over the knowledge of the rest of the world? How did they come to monopolize the authority of knowledge in the world? Why is it that what we know today as social, historical, philosophical, or critical theory is based on the socio-historical experience and world views of men from these five countries?[1]

Geopolitical Locations, Epistemological Mappings, and Historiographical Foundations

Biblical studies as an academic field suffers from what I would call an epistemological crisis.[2] The New Testament is a historical document, a set

1. Ramón Grosfoguel, "The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 11 (2013): 74.

2. This book centers mostly on the New Testament texts. Chapters selectively pick up texts from the gospels, Acts, and Paul's letters, and most secondary sources cited belong to the field of New Testament studies. Notwithstanding the focus on this part of the canon and the subsequent scholarly discourse, much of the methodological and theoretical considerations equally apply to the world of the Hebrew Bible, and different parts of the argument frequently refer to secondary literature in that field. Many of the metatheoretical considerations in this chapter and the methodological moves in the subsequent chapters have parallels in the way the field of Hebrew Bible stud-

of texts produced in the first century, no less than it is a religious and theological archive with enduring social, political, and cultural influence. These texts center religious liturgies weekly around the globe, belong in the museums through countless visual representations of their motifs, pop up regularly in political debates, influence the ways contemporary citizens understand themselves, and constitute an essential component of the educational curriculum across the widest variety of institutions. The epistemological crisis issues, I argue, from a mismatch between this plurality of identities—biblical texts exceed their historicity to morph into cultural entities of their own—and the ways professional critics have made historicism the lingua franca of biblical studies.[3]

This introductory chapter offers a tentative diagnosis of such a plight, offering a genealogy of the dominance of historicism and suggesting an alternative framework, via cultural studies, to broaden our epistemological options. My set of arguments, despite their seemingly impassionate take, aim at criticizing a certain hegemony, not at disqualifying its epistemological credentials. All knowledge is necessarily contextual, but not all knowledge occupies the same contexts. Knowledge production originates in political contexts with deeply rooted epistemological assumptions.[4] When certain contexts, with their sets of assumptions, claim privileged access to truth while disregarding alternative frameworks, hegemony ensues. In a nutshell, this introductory chapter argues that historicism constitutes a hegemonic mode of knowledge production in biblical studies

ies currently operates. For these reasons, I use *biblical studies* as an umbrella concept that refers mostly to the New Testament but reaches out to the Hebrew canon. This rationale, furthermore, is consistent with most critics' use of the term biblical studies.

3. See Anna Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making: Postcolonialism and New Testament Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 17–50; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 51–84; Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, "Mastering the Tools or Retooling the Masters? The Legacy of Historical-Critical Discourse," in *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse*, ed. Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, GPBS 9 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 1–30; George Aichele, Peter Miscall, and Richard Walsh, "An Elephant in the Room: Historical-Critical and Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible," *JBL* 128 (2009): 383–404.

4. Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Mignolo, *The Politics of Decolonial Investigations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

that has resulted in an impoverishment in the vocabularies, theories, and methods available to interpret biblical texts.

The introduction of an epistemological critique, a debunking of historicism as hegemony, represents both an exercise in epistemic justice and an essay on utopian thinking. On the one hand, Western notions of truth have relegated contextual knowledges to the margins of our discipline; on the other, the hegemony of historicism has hindered attempts at moving biblical studies toward creative intellectual paths. On this front, this introductory chapter grounds an ethos of biblical interpretation that materializes in a series of exegetical and hermeneutical exercises in the ensuing chapters. A critical genealogy of knowledge production as practiced in the Global North entails a questioning of the telos of our discipline. Is biblical studies an exclusively historicist discipline, a project of reconstructing a bygone past or distilling an ancient document's meanings, whether literary, cultural, or political? As I hope to show, the project of summoning cultural studies to the center of biblical hermeneutics has the potential to renew research agendas beyond the hackneyed roads of studying old topics with new methods. Most likely, some scholars will argue that my analysis overstates the case. There are innumerable counterexamples—many of them cited in the chapters that follow—and still, I insist, the hegemonic core of our discipline remains tied to a set of historicist assumptions.[5]

To ignore the multitude of new approaches that have emerged in biblical studies over the past fifty years would be oversimplifying the matter. Each chapter in this book relies heavily on these interpretive operations. However, it would also be simplistic to overlook the continued dominance of historicism as the standard for intellectual rigor and scholarly quality.

5. Let me offer on this front two sets of examples. Consider first the tables of contents of the most prestigious journals in our field: *Journal of Biblical Literature*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, *New Testament Studies*, *Theological Studies*, *Harvard Theological Review*, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, *Zeitschrift fur Neues Testament,* or *Estudios Biblicos*. Recent book contributions that survey the field of New Testament studies include Scot McKnight and Nijay Gupta, *The State of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019); Delbert Royce Burkett, *An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Some exceptions to the rule of historicism include Todd Penner and Davina C. Lopez, *De-introducing the New Testament: Texts, Worlds, Methods, Stories* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015); Mitzi J. Smith and Yung Suk Kim, *Toward Decentering the New Testament: A Reintroduction* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018).

Recent advancements in critical and contextualist biblical hermeneutics can be seen as building upon the fundamental questions of epistemology: How do we acquire knowledge? What type of knowledge? What are the historiographical assumptions underlying our exegetical arguments? Which research agendas and topics are prioritized? Which primary and secondary sources guide our interpretive task? Which theories, methods, approaches, and perspectives are favored? Ultimately, what is the purpose of our work? While the epistemological crisis in the Global North stems from the predominance of historical criticism, the crisis in the Global South is further complicated by the close connection between biblical knowledge and theological institutions. In the North, our academic community is predominantly characterized by historicism, objectivism, and a scientific mindset.[6] This triad, one that fuels secularism, as I show in this chapter's last section, feeds on the fact that demographically, methodologically, and in terms of the sources cited, biblical interpretation is in the hands of white, male scholars, in the grasp of a white method, and, almost exclusively, referential to white sources.[7] In the Global South, although epistemologically colonized, the task of biblical critique remains closely tied to contextual analyses, deeply concerned with a series of political, ethical, and cultural crises. The production of knowledge here springs from theological centers that have close ties with ecclesial communities. Demographically, methodologically, and in terms of the sources cited, biblical interpretation is in the hands of confessionalism.

This introduction offers no definite answers to the questions posed above, but it rehearses some theoretical and methodological explorations concerning the task of biblical critique, its epistemes and its heuristics, its concerns, and its *teloi*. The first and second chapters form a diptych: chapter 1 displays a tentative diagnosis of dominant and subjugated epistemes in our field, adventuring a theoretical armature that takes specific exegetical forms and shapes in the ensuing chapters; chapter 2 is an exercise in imagination in that it foregrounds a thematic fugue that reintroduces contemporary cultural and political crises into the field of New Testament studies. Both goals, the first eminently critical and the second predominantly constructive, are intimately connected. Concerning the first objec-

6. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 17–30.

7. Wongi Park ("Multiracial Biblical Studies," *JBL* 140 [2021]: 435–59) terms the field as "monoracial" and drowning in whiteness.

tive, this chapter roots biblical hermeneutics in the West, with its investment in historicism, as part of colonial knowledges. As we unearth the connections between historicism and colonialism, we discover some of the defining features of the historicist task, such as its extractivist ethos and objectivistic monopoly. Regarding the second objective, my purpose is to put theory to work not as a vain exercise in intellectualism but as an entryway to broach, within but at the discipline's margins, unattended topics in our guild. If historicism creates a series of asphyxiating circumstances for the flourishing of new areas of investigation, then cultural studies offers some inspiring alternatives for an ethically responsible production of knowledge.

The epistemological crisis—an idea that I will explore in the following sections—issues from a demographical stasis that, in turn, results in a democratic standstill in terms of how scholars produce, disseminate, and consume knowledge. Heretofore I referred to epistemological crisis to name a critical deficiency in the production of knowledge and the ensuing setback in the ways biblical critics imagine possible futures. Whereas the first item pertains to a sociology of knowledge—that is, who produces biblical scholarship and how such production circulates—the second dimension refers to how the current demographic patterns impede how biblical scholars sketch the lines of the discipline's future. Although the ethos of biblical interpretation differs in the North and Latin America, both are essentially indebted to certain strands of historicism as it issues from putative scientific historiography. Subsequently, a probe into the origins, production, and dissemination of knowledges requires a geopolitical account of different epistemes, their ecosystems, and their contentious relationships. On this front, the intellectual project of Epistemologies of the South by Boaventura de Sousa Santos constitutes an impulse to develop a more contextualized idea of our historiographical goals, a lucid framework to grasp the field's investments in the reconstruction of the past and its influence in the theorization of our present.[8]

As found in the epigraph to this introduction, Ramón Grosfoguel's pungent and somewhat rhetorical questions about the sociology of knowledge in the Global North apply seamlessly to the field of biblical studies. The dominance of historicism does not ensue from its inherent

8. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2014).

epistemological superiority nor from its ability to generate innovative research agendas. Rather, historicism benefits from a tradition of scientific knowledge that has effectively spread into the humanities. What does it mean to claim historicism dominance? Simply put: analyzing a biblical text involves retrieving its original meaning whether such meaning resides in the author's original intention, the text's rhetorical goals, or how the text works in a specific historical, cultural, or social context. Accordingly, I refer to this historiographical mode as *preterist* to express how scholars conceive the research agenda, the telos of hermeneutics, and the retrieval of textual meaning as the intellectual task of reconstructing the past as past.

In contrast, this book resorts to *presentism* as a historiographical style that conceptualizes biblical interpretation as the scholarly task of taking contemporary crises, topics, and traditions as the springboard to produce intellectual work. Whereas preteritism assumes that the "past" should inform the disciplinary domain, presentism argues that such a task is hegemonic and exclusionary and suggests that biblical scholarship should expand its scope to attend not only to the biblical past but also to the biblical present and future. Presentism and preteritism are not mutually exclusive options, but they have dramatically different purchasing values in the market of biblical studies. Given historicism's hegemonic role, even presentist-oriented studies consider preteritism as the sine qua non of intellectual rigor. Against views that naturally equate biblical interpretation to the past, what we call "exegesis," Vincent L. Wimbush forcefully argues that such an exegetical take represents "a high cultural practice and art…, a fetishization of text that in turn reflects a fetishization of the dominant world that the text helped create."[9]

9. Vincent L. Wimbush, *Black Flesh Matters. Essays on Runagate Interpretation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington/Fortress Academic, 2022), 106. Wimbush coins the term "scripturalization" to account for the process of making scriptures do things, "a semiosphere, within which a structure of reality is created that produces and legitimates and maintains media of knowing and discourse and the corresponding power relations" (*White Men's Magic: Scripturalization as Slavery* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], 46). See also Jacqueline M. Hidalgo, *Revelation in Aztlán: Scriptures, Utopias, and the Chicano Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). In a similar fashion, Steed Vernyl Davidson ("Postcolonializing the Bible with a Little Help from Derek Walcott," in *Present and Future of Biblical Studies: Celebrating Twenty-Five Years of Brill's Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Tat-siong Benny Liew, BibInt 161 [Leiden: Brill, 2018], 166) creates the term "to postcolonialize" to convey the notion that the hermeneutical

Different genealogies explain different elements of the current situation.[10] This chapter introduces a decolonial approach, seeking to reframe the terms in which preteritism and presentism relate to each other: instead of using the past as the template for the study of a biblical text, a decolonial approach situates the present as the framing narrative for the task at hand. Preteritism, as the critique goes, circumvents the colonial legacies of the biblical text because it conceives of the biblical past as a pristine historical moment,[11] impervious to the legacies of colonialism in the West. Preteritism, for instance, may claim that the biblical text is anti-imperialist, but only by resorting to ways of knowing that are indebted to colonial knowledges. Although presentism does not produce decolonial wisdom per se, it is better equipped to address the entanglement of knowledge production with coloniality because it unapologetically initiates the hermeneutical process with a theorization of current global realities.

In the Global North, the challenges to preteritism have mostly originated from identity-based critiques to the putatively objectivist scholarly

task, in the context of a postcolonial world, is called to tap "into the various domains around literature and the social to generate meaning from an ancient text to speak to the liberative needs of Mbembe's durées." These approaches share an understanding of the text not as a fixed entity that ought to be an interpretive object but rather a result of conflicting realities informing a conflictual world. From a queer perspective, see also Ken Stone, "Bibles That Matter: Biblical Theology and Queer Performativity," *BTB* 38 (2008): 14–25.

10. Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 2007); Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011); Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000); Henning Graf Reventlow and William Farmer, *Biblical Studies and the Shifting of Paradigms, 1850–1914*, JSOTSup 192 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995); Craig Bartholomew, C. Stephen Evans, Mary Healy, and Murray Rae, *"Behind" The Text: History and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2003); Vincent Wimbush, ed., *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001); R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: History, Method, Practice* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000).

11. The construction of the past as an authentic, clear, and stable entity is itself a part of the racialized discourse in the West; see Shawn Kelly, *Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (London: Routledge, 2002).

ethos. In Latin America, at least within the liberationist tradition, the critique springs from contextualist takes inspired by Marxism. In the first case, consider, for instance, Wongi Park's critique of the ways that whiteness suffuses historicism. A theoretical and methodological advocacy for multiracial criticism, Park's contribution, an anomaly itself in the publication record of the flagship journal, exposes whiteness as orchestrating, baton in hand, the disciplinary choir.[12] Whiteness provides the invisible but dominant slant that different interpretative strategies invested in historicism inadvertently trade in. Whiteness, an ethos of performing the critical task,[13] is then historically attached, methodologically wedded, and theoretically invested in historicism. Biblical studies' monoracialism, Park accurately determines, is the epiphenomenon of a complex historical disciplinary trajectory that understands itself tied to European, mostly German, roots (genealogy), invested in historical criticism (method), and committed to a research agenda issuing from such origins and methodological investments.[14] This is not just a high-theory analysis of cultural trends within our field. To the chagrin of those who deny or minimize criticism's investment in whiteness, Park reminds us of the statistics. If knowledge production, as the sociology of knowledge and the philosophy of science have amply demonstrated, is tied to its demographics, there is little wonder that biblical critique reproduces the interests of white, Anglo-Saxon, and German, cisgender males, straight, and upper-middle or middle-class researchers. Wongi Park's analysis instantiates in biblical studies what Ramón Grosfoguel diagnoses about the humanities writ large.

12. Park, "Multiracial Biblical Studies," 454.

13. Whiteness, at least in this version, is an episteme: a dominant ethos of doing biblical research, invisible as the air we breathe and for this reason informing every dimension of scholarship as scholarship. Whiteness, to say it with Michel Foucault (*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan [London: Peregrine, 1979], 170; "Truth and Power," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al. [New York: Vintage, 1980], 120–25), has disciplinary and capillary power: not as coming from above but as shaping who we are, what we do, and how we imagine. It is from this perspective that scholars of color are not immune to whiteness very much like queer scholars are likely to perpetuate heterosexism, etc. As Park ("Multiracial Biblical Studies," 447) points out, at stake here is whiteness's unexamined assumptions about history, knowledge, and hermeneutics.

14. Park, "Multiracial Biblical Studies," 440.

The epistemological crisis, however, transcends race and ethnicity because it evinces the close ties between the academic ethos and the concerns of marginalized populations, between intellectual inquiry for the sake of intellectualism and political activism geared toward transformative change.[15] Our field still considers, to name a few, queer theory, postcolonial critique, or disability studies a postscript rather than essential and formative components of its modus operandi. Significant historical and philosophical factors sustain the existing hegemonic episteme. Regardless of explanatory genealogies, including the one rehearsed in this chapter, the end result proves that professional biblical interpretation remains oblivious to contemporary political and cultural crises, ill-equipped to address the concerns of the majority world. Communities affected by such problems hardly make their voices present in the echo chambers of biblical scholarship. Furthermore, the hermeneutical theoretical traditions in the North have made it either impossible or unreputable to mix contemporary concerns and agendas with biblical texts and contexts. Such is the realm of historicism as preteritism.

The landscape in the Global South remains a bit more scattered and, for that reason, more inspiring. Numerous scholars and centers inaugurated and contributed to emancipatory hermeneutics, while many others adhere to the epistemologies imported from the North.[16] Rather than focusing on identity-based claims, Latin American exegesis has gravitated around the category of the impoverished, a socioeconomic category that informs hermeneutical methods as they bridge the historiographical gap.[17] Although "the option for the poor" grounds emancipatory hermeneutics,[18]

15. Miranda Fricker (*Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 7) makes a useful distinction between two forms of epistemic injustice: "testimonial injustice," in which someone is wronged as a producer of knowledge; and "hermeneutical injustice," in which someone is wronged in their capacity as subject of social understanding.

16. Osbert Uyovwieyovwe Isiorhovoja, Godwin Omegwe, and Sylvester Ese Ibomhen, "Quest for Africentric Biblical Reading among African Christians," *KIU Journal of Humanities* 8 (2023): 257–63, https://doi.org/10.58709/niujhu.v8i2.1676.

17. Miguel Ángel Ferrando, "La interpretación de la Biblia en la teología de la liberación, 1971–1984," *Teología y Vida* 50 (2009): 75–92, http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0049–34492009000100007; René Krüger, "Teología bíblica contextual en América Latina," *Acta Poética* 31 (2010): 185–207, https://doi.org/10.19130/iifl.ap.2010.2.351.

18. The question of the "poor and crucified" at the center of the theological task is at the heart of the methodological reflection. Thus bibliography here is extensive: see Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984);

biblical exegesis has been particularly slow to ground how such ethical-political commitments find their rationale in historiographical and philosophical theories indebted to the North. Biblical hermeneutics, on the one hand, has drawn from theological agendas determined by confessional interests and, on the other, has been slow to incorporate methodological insights from decolonial philosophies. On this front—on the importance of history—my contribution contextualizes a specific historical way of knowing as it is practiced in our field within a broader episteme. In the following section, I argue that historicism, inextricable from scientificism and objectivism, is best understood as part of colonial knowledges.

Historicism relies on inextricable links between exegesis, objectivism, and scientificism. As a virtual solution, from a global perspective, I explore what models of knowledge are available to scholars disinvested in the afterlife of the Enlightenment.[19] Historicism, a component of the modernist macro-episteme, forecloses in advance research topics (heuristics) and disbands the richness of reading strategies that readers bring to the table.[20]

Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom: The Martyrs of El Salvador and the Crucified Peoples* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003); Sobrino, *No Salvation outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008); Manfred K. Bahmann, *A Preference for the Poor: Latin American Liberation Theology from a Protestant Perspective* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005); José María Vigil and Leonardo Boff, *La opción por los pobres*, Presencia Teológica (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1991); Vigil and Boff, *¿Qué es optar por los pobres? Evangelio con rostro Latinoamericano* (Santa Fé de Bogotá: Ediciones Paulinas, 1994); María López Vigil, Jon Sobrino, and Rafael Díaz-Salazar, *La matanza de los pobres: Vida en medio de la muerte en El Salvador* (Madrid: HOAC, 1993); Jorge V. Pixley and Clodovis Boff, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor*, Theology and Liberation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989); José M. Castillo, *Los pobres y la teología: ¿Qué queda de la teología de la liberación?* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 1997); Castillo, *Escuchar lo que dicen los pobres a la iglesia* (Barcelona: Cristianisme i Justícia, 1999); José Ignacio González Faus, *Vicarios de Cristo: Los pobres en la teología y espiritualidad Cristianas; Antología comentada* (Barcelona: Cristianisme i Justícia, 2005).

19. A difficult task, since "biblical scholarship" is "still fundamentally predetermined and contained by the Enlightenment episteme" (Moore and Sherwood, *Invention of the Biblical Scholar*, 48).

20. Literary criticism outside biblical studies has now a long and rich tradition of moving beyond critical theory with its narrow focus on criticism as demystification and exposure. These debates have not touched the surface of biblical studies because, among other reasons, our field has never fully embraced critical theory. In a masterfully elegant book, Rita Felski (*The Limits of Critique* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015]) makes the rather simple but brilliant point that interpreting involves all

Consider, for instance, the plight that queer hermeneutics faces. This approach falls outside of the Northern side because it is not historical enough. Despite its contextual nature, it remains outside of the scope of Latin American approaches because of their confessionalism, clericalism, and political commitments. The irony should not be lost on us: biblical scholarship lacks the hermeneutical potency to address the seemingly most homophobic text—as performed in cultural debates about marriage equality, for instance. Historicism straitjackets virtually all approaches to the topic of sexuality by confining the types of questions that count for scholarly relevance. Even the most queer-friendly agendas remain thoroughly historicist: Is there "sexuality" in antiquity? Does Paul consider homoeroticism a moral fall? Is there "homosexuality" in the Bible?[21] Notice that these questions not only welcome historicist practices, but they are also posed—ironically, given queer theory's aversion to essences—in quite identitarian terms.[22]

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kinds of affects, dispositions, embodiments, and goals and that literary critique has not developed an adequate vocabulary to convey all this wealth. See also Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Bruno Latour are to be credited with this "postcritical" turn. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 123–52; Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 225–48. For a helpful survey, see Tim Lanzendörfer and Mathias Nilges, "Literary Studies after Postcritique: An Introduction," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 64 (2019): 491–513; and Herman Paul, "The Postcritical Turn: Unravelling the Meaning of 'Post' and 'Turn,'" in *Writing the History of the Humanities: Questions, Themes and Approaches,* ed. Herman Paul (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 305–24.

21. One of the most interesting examples can be found in the discipline's flagship journal: *Journal of Biblical Literature.* Jeramy Townsley ("Paul, the Goddess Religions, and Queer Sects: Romans 1:23–28," *JBL* 130 [2011]: 728) uses the word "queer" to refer to all kinds of idolatrous practices and "to the gender and sex-variant practices of the goddess cults." Townsley can only conclude that Paul is not really referring to "contemporary queer relationships" by emptying *queer* of any nonheteronormative connotation. Given my argument's emphasis on the structure of the knowledge production, it should be noticed that this is the only time that *JBL* has published an article with reference to queer theory. There are, of course, multiple exceptions, and all of them will be cited in the following chapters. These exceptions, however, remain on the epistemic margins of our discipline.

22. As Moore and Sherwood (*Invention of the Biblical Scholar*, 73) observe, "in academia in the West, we cannot seem to get past a certain obstinate essentialism that lingers around the brute fact of being 'black' or 'Asian' or 'gay' or 'transgendered'

Queer historicism, as practiced in the North, inadvertently replicates a colonial framework because it centers the "history of sexuality" in the West. As the Foucauldian genealogy goes, sexuality is a Western invention that maps onto the past a set of arrangements that obscure how the Greco-Roman world lacked identitarian labels around sex. Whereas queer approaches illuminate first-century notions of sex "outside sexuality," they also reify the idea that we ought to take the origins of European history as normative.[23] On this front, queer historiography participates in the historical-critical principle that the present remains an obstacle to grasp the past. The plot thickens. Since the production of knowledge in the Global South is rooted in ecclesial institutions, topics around sex, gender, and sexuality remain underexplored or framed within enclosed theological agendas. My hope is that, by shifting the epistemological terms, we no longer rely on erasing the present as a condition of possibility to make claims about our past. Presentism on this front is not oppositional to preteritism but an ethos that expands and frames our study of the past. In the wake of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, whose initiative I present in the next section, I argue that, by relying on preteritism/historicism, biblical hermeneutics offers a nonabyssal solution to an abyssal problem. Such a metatheoretical approach—insofar as it scrutinizes conditions of knowledge production—leverages decolonial philosophy both in its critique and its proposal. My hope is that Epistemologies of the South incites new developments in liberation hermeneutics. Consequently, in the next section, inspired by a series of decolonial thinkers from the Global South, I situate historicism, secularism, and objectivism as practices of epistemicide. Modernity/coloniality, even in its postmodern iterations, obliterated, disparaged, and chastised nonscientific knowledge as faulty sapience. Coloniality hunted, strangled, and ultimately killed traditions that did not abide by its objectivist, allegedly universalistic, ethos.

The conceptualization of the abyssal line affects New Testament studies because it puts a magnifying lens on the fact that research agendas and exegetical inquiries find their ethos on this side of the line. Rather than

in a way that it does not around, say, being 'working class.'" In chapters 2, 6, and 7, I seek to move beyond essentialist claims by focusing on queer practices rather than on identities.

23. See Luis Menéndez-Antuña, "Bible and Sexuality Studies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Bible in Latin and Latinx America,* ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Ahida Pilarski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

being natural, straightforward, and direct inroads into texts, the questions posed in the North issue from inherited genealogies of history, science, and hermeneutics. Admittedly, the same, in descriptive fashion, applies to the Global South. In the case of the Bible, the wedding of theologies and biblical scholarship, or rather, the insertion of biblical studies within theological disciplines, dependent on ecclesial contexts, results in a thematic production constrained by confessional interests. Epistemologies of the South creates a normative hermeneutical ontology that denaturalizes criticism on this side, unhinges exegesis from theology without necessarily erasing it, and ultimately foregrounds a presentist model that allows criticism to prioritize contemporary crises.

Ultimately, the drive behind this intellectual enterprise issues from a lament, a scholarly mourning of sorts, about the poverty, inadequacy, mostly scarcity, of our vocabularies, theories, concepts, and methods to convey the complicated relationships contemporary readers of all sorts keep with ancient texts. Despite historicist prejudices, the task of expanding how contemporary readers, whether professional, academic, flesh and blood, religious, and so on, embrace the historical archive entails neither endorsing confessional, political, or ideological agendas nor excluding them. In an academic example of "when you have a hammer, every problem looks like a nail," historicism closely monitors the standards of proper biblical knowledge: every issue ought to be historical. The result turns out to be a field dried out, ill-equipped to account for the obvious fact that the Bible is not *just* a historical document; it is a cultural device, a political composition, a theological understanding of reality, a witness of the myriad ways ancient actors interpreted reality, and, perhaps more prominently, a document that conjures very different types of cognitive, emotional, and communal reactions in the present.[24] All these elements belong at the core of biblical interpretation itself.[25]

24. See Eric D. Barreto, "Introduction" in *Thinking Theologically: Foundations for Learning*, ed. Eric D. Barreto (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 1–6; Greg Carey, *Using Our Outside Voice: Public Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2020), 12–25.

25. The ethical vision on this front is distinct from John J. Collins's (*The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005]) call for an informed consensus and the need for a common ground for critical engagement because this project ultimately centers historicism as the criterion for scholarly rigor. Postmodernism's danger is "the disintegration of the conversation into a cacophony of voices, each asserting that their convictions are by definition preferred" (Collins, *The Bible after Babel*, 161). Notably missing in Collins's otherwise insightful

Epistemologies of the South and Epistemicide

Addressing hermeneutics in the Global North inevitably involves tackling historicism and its discontents. Dissatisfaction with the hegemonic episteme has a long tradition of its own. Although the knife has gotten sharper and the cutlers more numerous, historical criticism has morphed accordingly, becoming a moving target that repeatedly centers itself as offering criteria for establishing what counts as rigorous scholarship. By the time the surgeons have opened wide their object, the alleged patient has left the surgical table onto better things. A fascinating phenomenon indeed, considering that the practitioners come to the table with the most sophisticated tools. Fernando F. Segovia, Vincent L. Wimbush, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Stephen D. Moore, and Tat-siong Benny Liew, to name a few, have tackled the tyranny of historicism from a wide variety of perspectives.[26] Most recently, building on such trajectory, Wongi Park has advanced the Multiracial Biblical Studies project as a multifaceted approach invested in exposing the white dominance attached to historicism.

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analysis and conciliatory tone is an analysis of power in the production of knowledge. For what it is worth, this book is an essay in cacophonies in the sense that a multitude of theories, methods, approaches, and questions dialogue with each other without a clear methodological center. Zeba Crook's recent review of John Dominic Crossan's 2022 work (*Render unto Caesar: The Struggle over Christ and Culture in the New Testament* [New York: HarperOne, 2022]) epitomizes how historicism centers itself by way of discrediting theological takes as outside our discipline. Crook argues that this type of scholarship "is more biblical theology than biblical scholarship" ("Render unto Caesar," *BAR* 49.2 [2023]: 28).

26. Tat-siong Benny Liew, "What Has Been Done? What Can We Learn? Racial/Ethnic Minority Readings of the Bible in the United States," in *The Future of the Biblical Past: Envisioning Biblical Studies on a Global Key*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Roland Boer, SemeiaSt 66 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 307–336. Also in the same volume, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Changing the Paradigms: Toward a Feminist Future of the Biblical Past," 289–306; Fernando F. Segovia, "Cultural Criticism: Expanding the Scope of Biblical Criticism," 307–36; Vincent L. Wimbush, "Signifying on the Fetish: Mapping a New Critical Orientation," 337–48; see also Stephen D. Moore, "A Modest Manifesto for New Testament Literary Criticism: How to Interface with a Literary Studies Field That Is Postliterary, Posttheoretical, and Postmethodological," in *The Bible in Theory: Critical and Postcritical Essays*, RBS 57 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2010), 355–372.

The project of Multiracial Biblical Studies implicitly addresses the crisis as issuing from the dominance of whiteness.[27] Our guild, essentially "monoracial," drowns in whiteness; demographically, methodologically, and in terms of the sources cited, biblical interpretation, at least as it is practiced in the Global North, is in the hands of white scholars, in the grasp of a white method (historicism), and almost exclusively referential to white sources. Whiteness, ubiquitous and therefore invisible, argues, colors—plagues, really—trends, spaces, and institutions in biblical scholarship.[28] Monoracialism as whiteness infuses the production of knowledge: it centers and trades European and Euro-American sources globally. As the pithy title suggests, Park offers multiracial biblical studies as the cure for the monoracial disease, an enterprise, an ethos that provincializes and particularizes whiteness by locating it in a much wider landscape of ethnic identifications. The potential result yields, one can only hope, a broadening of the current epistemological limitations and a stretching of the boundaries of legitimate knowledge production. Briefly, if whiteness filters "rigorous scholarship," multiracialism would open the narrowly defined gates of scholarly flow.

Park acknowledges the pioneers in identifying the epistemological problems: per Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia, "stretching conventional boundaries and borders of the field"; per Denise Kimber Buell, an "expansive definition of biblical canons"; per Tat-siong Benny Liew, a "citational invention of tradition."[29] Not a comprehensive inventory but an exemplary set of virtual proposals and strategies, not a focalized investment in any particular theory or method but an assortment of possible paths moving forward, the project of Multiracial Biblical Studies scaffolds a platform to move beyond historicism. The guild

27. Park, "Multiracial Biblical Studies," 435–59.

28. Park, "Multiracial Biblical Studies," 454.

29. Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia, eds., *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, SemeiaSt 57 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009); Denise Kimber Buell, "Canons Unbound," in *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, BW 9.1 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 293; Tat-siong Benny Liew, *What Is Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics? Reading the New Testament* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press; Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 2008). All quotes from Park, "Multiracial Biblical Studies," 456, with the last one a quotation from Liew, *What Is Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics*, 8.

need not be—and these are my own words—an asphyxiating and tedious chamber for mainstream biblical scholarship, now turned into a declawed and defanged creature that discounts as edgy any creative and invigorating contribution.

A theoretical and methodological advocacy for multiracial criticism, Park's contribution exposes whiteness as orchestrating, baton in hand, the disciplinary choir. Whiteness provides the invisible but dominant slant that different interpretive strategies invested in historicism inadvertently reinforce. Whiteness, an ethos of performing the critical task, is then historically attached, methodologically wedded, and theoretically invested in historicism. Biblical studies' monoracialism, Park accurately determines, is the epiphenomenon of a complex historical disciplinary trajectory that understands itself tied to European, mostly German, roots (genealogy), invested in historical criticism (method), and committed to a research agenda issuing from such origins and methodological investments.[30]

Whiteness, despite cultural assumptions, goes beyond phenotypical traits and seeps into methodology. Historical-criticism dominance relies on whiteness and vice versa. As Park puts it:

> To be clear, the fact that a majority of scholars prefer historical criticism, in and of itself, is not the issue—just as the fact that a majority of scholars identify as male and White is not the issue either. The problem, at root, lies in the intricate relationship between the two. The way historical criticism functions in biblical studies as a universal, normative, unmarked method of interpretation is a telltale sign of its proximity to whiteness.… The underlying issue is that the dominant methodological center of biblical studies elevates Eurocentric models of history, epistemology, and social location—a process that is centered through the very methods of the field. In this sense, and only in this sense, White scholars enjoy a hermeneutical advantage insofar as their identities, locations, and methods are presumed as the norm.[31]

On this front, Park's diagnosis of biblical critique as monoracial constitutes a sharp analysis of biblical studies' infrastructure: its demographics and sociological conditions. Similarly, Park's proposed treatment in the shape of multiracial interventions promises to provincialize whiteness and historicize historicism. It is on this front—on the importance of history—

30. Park, "Multiracial Biblical Studies," 440.
31. Park, "Multiracial Biblical Studies," 447.

that my contribution contextualizes a specific way of knowing (history), as it is practiced in our field, within a broader episteme. In the following section, I argue that historicism, inextricable from scientificism, objectivism, and secularism, is best understood as part of colonial knowledges. Although the multiracial approach judges the field in terms of its tangled links between whiteness and historicism, I suggest that such a verdict replicates, at least partially, historicist assumptions, ironically renewing whiteness. It remains, to say it differently, too confined in Western and USA-based theorizations of race and ethnicity. As a virtual solution, from a global perspective, I explore what models of knowledge are available to scholars disinvested in historicism, objectivism, and scientificism. A particularization of whiteness, prescribed as the key remedy, remains an urgent need and a pressing project, but it leaves unaddressed and undertheorized whiteness as part of the colonial, capitalist, (post)modernist, and secularist projects, all of which suffuse biblical studies at a deeper level.[32] To use Santos's terminology, multiracialism offers a nonabyssal solution to an abyssal problem. Turning to different and more diverse sources remains a primordial task,[33] but it will leave the field untouched unless we interrogate the nature of such an approach and, more relevantly, unless we learn from those very same sources what constitutes knowledge in the first place. Consequently, in the next section, in the wake of decolonial theory issuing from the Global South, I explore how historicism, secularism, and objectivism manifest epistemicidal inclinations. "Subjugated knowledges," "decolonial epistemologies," or "unknown unknowns" refer, then, to the wisdom that modernity/coloniality, even in its postmodern iterations, obliterated, disparaged, and chastised as inadequate sapience.

The invention of race in modern science and the subsequent dominance of whiteness as the superior/default ethnic ascription stems from colonialism. The convergence of whiteness and historicism is not a mere historical accident; it is the product of the colonial project that, as postcolonial and decolonial thinkers have shown, did not end with the conquest of the land. Colonialism imposed a cosmovision, a reorganization of the world with European knowledges, anthropologies, and taxonomies as nor-

32. Park, "Multiracial Biblical Studies," 459.

33. "What would it mean, for example to develop an approach to biblical studies using Aboriginal, Ethiopian, Jamaican, Korean, Malay, Mestizo, Native American, or South Asia sources?" (Park, "Multiracial Biblical Studies," 459). See also Wimbush, *Black Flesh Matters*, 97–142.

mative. Such imposition erased indigenous ways of knowledge, resulting in an epistemicide of global proportions. As we will see, religious/theological knowledge played a fundamental role both in colonialism and coloniality. Contemporary historicism's roots grow deeper than its German origins; it is the epiphenomenon of the epistemological shift accompanying modernity/coloniality. Therefore, a critique and a constructive proposal ought to engage in decolonial thinking.

Decolonial epistemologies have taken modernity to task for its entanglement with imperialism. Theorists and activists from the Latin American subcontinent offer different narratives, but they all coincide in tracing contemporary (post)modernity to its colonial roots, mapping the power imbalances in the divide between North and South and its subsequent division between subjugating and subjugated knowledges. Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo, and Aníbal Quijano offer compelling accounts of the Enlightenment project from the "other side," exposing historicism, objectivism, scientificism, and secularism for their colonial abetment.[34] Although these theoretical projects have a broad influence in different fields in the humanities, their reach has barely touched biblical scholarship. Critical accounts of the genealogies of biblical criticism have drawn almost exclusively upon Western epistemologies. This is a theoretical development worth exploring itself. With such an objective in mind, I suggest that Boaventura de Sousa

34. Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of the "The Other" and the Myth of Modernity* (New York: Continuum, 1995); Walter Mignolo, *The Politics of Decolonial Investigations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021); Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from the South* 3 (2000): 533–80. See also Arturo Escobar and David L. Frye, *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020); Santiago Castro-Gómez and Ramón Grosfoguel, *El giro decolonial: Reflexiones para una diversidad epistémica más allá del capitalismo global* (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores, 2007); Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving toward Africa* (London: Routledge, 2016); Julie Cupples and Ramón Grosfoguel, *Unsettling Eurocentrism in the Westernized University* (London: Routledge, 2019); Paula D. Royster, *Decolonizing Arts-Based Methodologies: Researching the African Diaspora* (Leiden: Brill, 2021); José Romero Losacco, *Pensar distinto, pensar de(s)colonial* (Caracas: Editorial El Perro y la Rana, 2021); Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Descolonización y el giro decolonial," *Tabula Rasa* 9 (2008): 61–72; Walter Mignolo, *The Politics of Decolonial Investigations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2021); Aníbal Quijano, *Ensayos en torno a la colonialidad del poder* (Ediciones del Signo: Buenos Aires, 2019); Walter Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, and Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

Santos, an exemplary theorist from the Global South, and his proposal titled Epistemologies of the South introduce a new epistemic paradigm that aids biblical scholars in disinvesting from objectivism, enabling them with the possibility of charting a different future for the discipline.

Epistemologies of the South, both the overarching philosophical project and the title of one of the works in which such a project is presented, relies on a series of key concepts (abyssal line, sociology of absences/emergences, ecology of knowledges, intercultural translation, and artisanship of practices) whose detailed presentation and examination exceed this chapter's goals. Here, I am interested in showing how Epistemologies of the South contributes to a clearer diagnosis of biblical studies' epistemological crisis. In such a diagnosis whiteness constitutes an important but not essential part of the epistemicide perpetrated in the abyssal line. Let us turn now to expound the concept.

In *The End of the Cognitive Empire,* Boaventura de Sousa Santos explains how the project of Epistemologies of the South is also an ontological exercise because it creates nonexistent knowledges about erased realities.[35] The distinction between abyssal and nonabyssal realities grounds the epistemological project, and it offers a heuristically rich idea for analyzing the distinctions between colonial and decolonial epistemologies, ethics, and politics. The project is political from the outset: whereas ontology allows us to excavate erased realities and epistemology animates us to invest in other ways of knowing, the political dimension, after the proper diagnosis, seeks to make sure that abyssal problems are handled by abyssal solutions. Moreover, whereas epistemologies in the North occupy themselves with what we can know and how we know it, the question from the other side of the abyss is: Is it worth knowing? Santos faults modern social sciences for having conceived of humanity as living on this side of the line when, in reality, there is an abyssal gap on both sides of the colonial reality (metropoly/colony). Modernity's inventions, such as the liberal state, the rule of law, human rights, and democratic rule are forms of deception that erase epistemological lines while papering over the abyss that separates both realities:

> the abyssal line is the core idea underlying the epistemologies of the South. It marks the radical division between forms of metropolitan

35. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

> sociability and forms of colonial sociability that has characterized the Western modern world since the fifteenth century. This division creates two worlds of domination, the metropolitan and the colonial world, two worlds that, even as twins, present themselves as incommensurable. The metropolitan world is the world of equivalence and reciprocity among "us," those who are, like us, fully human.[36]

The discrete gap between the modes of socialization in the metropolis and the colony does not accurately map onto geographically distinct areas but rather corresponds to different worlds falling on opposite sides of modernity: both spheres interact but represent oppositional ontologies. The world of the metropolis thrives on the epistemology of the North: scientificism and objectivism, an understanding of knowledge as politically neutral, a staunch division between the subject and object of study, and a separation between theory and praxis (more on how these elements play in biblical studies in the last section). The abyssal line is definitional: on this side, the world of the metropolis; on the other side, the colonized world. This ontological distinction underlies an epistemological one: knowledge about the realities on the other side is nonexistent, reading reality on the other side as nonreality, therefore offering putatively global solutions that replicate the abyssal gap.[37] Santos faults European critical thought precisely for being "built upon a mirage," for thinking that "all exclusions are nonabyssal."[38]

How many scholars from the Global South are regularly cited as part of biblical criticism? How much allegedly liberatory hermeneutics relies on sources sanctioned in the Global North? Even when scholars from the Global South get to publish in what is considered the top journals in our field—supposedly known for their international appeal—the list of sources remains exclusively produced in the Global North. Knowledge produced on the other side of the abyss does not qualify as knowledge: presumably international biblical scholarship knows nothing about African or Latin American biblical scholarship.

The gap and the negation of reality (what lies on the other side of the abyssal line) constitutes Western scholarship, despite its selling appeal as global and international. As Santos puts it, "the sociology of absences

36. Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 19–20.
37. Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 118–35.
38. Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 25.

is the cartography of the abyssal line. It identifies the ways and means through which the abyssal line produces nonexistence, radical invisibility, and irrelevance."[39] Epistemologies of the South, acutely attuned to the intensification of global crises, strongly argues that the production, value, dissemination, and consumption of knowledge on this side of the abyssal line bypasses the aggravating conditions of the Majority World. More important, Western knowledge has equated the scientific problem-solving dimension with technocracy, generating a type of paradigmatic ethos that operates singularly on exclusionary binarisms such as subject/object, reason/emotion, individual/community, and so on. In sum, Santos's core contribution is as straightforward as it is overarching: epistemologies as valid knowledges prodigiously exceed the Western scientific paradigm, and such a paradigm has resulted in epistemicide (the destruction of rival knowledges deemed as nonscientific).[40]

Epistemologies of the South enacts a forceful critique of customary knowledge production in the Western academy. With its drive for epistemicide and its extractivist ethos, scholarship on this side of the abyss understands research as learning from rather than learning with. Extractivist methodologies vary in modes and figurations, but they share in the assumption that the scientist/interpreter stands in a position of superiority regarding her "object" of study.[41] Put differently, "nonextractivist methodologies aim at knowing-with instead of knowing-about, founding relations among knowing subjects rather than between subjects and objects."[42] Of course, this expansive view of the epistemological processes does not disqualify scientific knowledge; it fittingly contextualizes a specific type of expertise within an organic, ecological, and wholesome understanding of knowledge production. Epistemicide, then, refers not only to the disqualification of organic, postabyssal knowledges but also to the dismissal of the types of knowledges fit to address the issues that such epistemicide has created. We live in a world, Santos argues, created by modern science where the myth of progress—and its assumption that global crises have a

39. Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 25.

40. Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 296.

41. An object of study that is, in turn, gendered and racialized; see Yii-Jan Lin, "Who Is the Text? The Gendered and Racialized New Testament," in *The Oxford Handbook of New Testament, Gender, and Sexuality*, ed. Benjamin H. Dunning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019): 137–156.

42. Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 297.

technical solution—is partly responsible for the problems themselves. On the other side of the abyss, however, we are to explore "a vast landscape of postabyssal knowledges, postabyssal methodologies, postabyssal pedagogies whose main objective is to generate a radical demand for the democratization of knowledge, a demand for cognitive democracy."[43]

Biblical Hermeneutics and the Epistemologies of the South

Epistemologies of the South theorizes epistemology as a philosophical field traversed by ethical-political commitments. The value-neutral configuration of Western knowledge is both dispensable and impossible. Santos argues that "the epistemologies of the South conceive of indifference toward the struggles of the oppressed as one of the most deep-rooted kinds of ignorance produced by the epistemologies of the North in our time."[44] On the one hand, the ideologically impartial aspiration of Western knowledge covers its own colonialist roots; on the other, it constructs epistemological and ontological analyses of the abyssal divide as "not-knowledge/ignorance." Although Santos does not minimize race and ethnicity as markers of subjugation, as components of epistemicide, he subsumes racialization processes within the global historicized dynamics of colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism. Epistemologies of the South shares this contextualization and theorization of racial/ethnic classifications with most decolonial theorists from the Global South.

In the Global North, there is a multidimensional connection between historicism and whiteness.[45] Such association between ethnic ascription and methodological preference belongs to a wider set of equations, with whiteness on one side and epistemological options on the other: historicism, objectivism, scientificism, and secularism, to name a few. In this section, I signal how these four prevalent dimensions on this side of the abyss dislodge theological/religious thought—a recurrent component in the Global South—of legitimacy within our field. Biblical studies, in its Euro-North American variant, regards theological commitments as inimical to biblical science. Of course, such implicit disavowal should not lead us to infer that scholarship is devoid of theological assumptions. On the contrary, it should be clear by now that mainstream biblical scholarship

43. Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 295.
44. Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 91.
45. Park, "Multiracial Biblical Studies," 445–50.

in the Global North is suffused with individualist notions of agency, will, or sin.[46] As Moore and Sherwood have compellingly demonstrated, Euro-American biblical scholarship's pledge to objectivism has, on the one hand, dismissed religious/theological investments as inimical to sound exegesis and, on the other, allowed unexamined Western theological foundations to slip through the cracks of most biblical exegetical arguments.[47]

Secular critique on this side of the abyss thinks of theological commitments on the other side as parochial, contextualist, and subjective. Theology, as the argument goes, pollutes history. The relation between the epistemologies of the North, secularism, whiteness, and colonialism calls for further exploration.[48] For Aníbal Quijano, the processes of racialization in the colonies are determined by the need to determine labor divisions geared toward the extraction of resources.[49] Modernity/coloniality operates, then, on a series of shifting dichotomies that keep the abyssal line in place. Religion/secular plays a determinative role not least because the religious realm has come to stand in opposition to reason, enlightenment, civilization, liberalism, and the like. On this front, Nelson Maldonado-Torres offers a compelling analysis of the formative trajectories of religion as they interact with the forces of colonialism and the formations of race.[50] For Maldonado-Torres, coloniality/modernity allowed for indigenous religions to enter the category of religion at the precise moment when the subontological difference religion/nonreligion ceased being a major axis of differentiation:

> In this transition the idea of exorcising religion from public life also became important. In this context, the colonizer can afford having the colonized claim entry into the realm of the religious. But this is done under at least two presuppositions: (a) that European religiosity is still

46. See an evocative critique of this trend from a historicist framework in Katherine A. Shaner, "The Danger of Singular Saviors: Women, Slaves, and Jesus's Disturbance in the Temple (Mark 11:15–19)," *JBL* 140 (2021): 139–61.

47. Moore and Sherwood, *Invention of the Biblical Scholar*, 123–32.

48. See Eduardo Mendieta, "Imperial Somatics and Genealogies of Religion: How We Never Became Secular," in *Postcolonial Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Purushottama Bilimoria and Andrew B. Irvine (Berlin: Springer, 2009), 235–50.

49. Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1 (2000): 533–80.

50. Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Race, Religion, and Ethics in the Modern/Colonial World," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 42 (2014): 691–711.

> taken as the standard for defining acceptable religions, which means that the anti-colonial act of claiming religion in a context where such act is denied can also entail the assumption and incorporation of Eurocentric elements, and (b) that having religion no longer provides the ultimate or definitive concession of full humanity.[51]

Right when indigenous belief systems were admitted into "religion," religion became surpassed by autonomy, reason, and science. Decolonial thought shows how secularism did not replace theology; it surreptitiously attached it to new forms of legitimization.[52] An Yountae suggests that "the continuing regime of coloniality from the fifteenth century to today is in a way characterized by the replacement of one theology by another. The newly imposed theology of secularism places the notion of the human at its center—a particular conception of the human."[53] Like recent developments in biblical hermeneutics, where one method surpasses the previous one even as it leaves untouched grounding epistemological premises, knowledge on this side of coloniality evolves as it renders the abyssal line nonexistent.

If it is true that historicism has dismissed theological thinking as biased, anachronistic, or unscientific, the same applies to historicism's hegemonic fellow: literary analysis in the vein of critical theory, a modus operandi to which I have subscribed in my own scholarship.[54] Biblical studies' resort to postmodern theory has had a similar effect on the developments of the discipline: Foucault, Derrida, Butler, Said, or Spivak, to name a few of the high-theory inspirers, ratify the abandonment of any theological critique in biblical studies.[55] However, as decolonial thinkers from the South insist, the religious/theological realm constitutes an essential component of much biblical/theological production. For instance, José Carlos Mariategui, the Peruvian philosopher who would eventually inspire Gustavo Gutiérrez and serve as intellectual fodder to many revo-

51. Maldonado-Torres, "Race, Religion, and Ethics," 708.

52. Galen Watts and Sharday Morusinjohn, "Can Critical Religion Play by Its Own Rules? Why There Must be More Ways to Be 'Critical' in the Study of Religion," *JAAR* 90 (2022): 1–18.

53. An Yountae, "Decolonial Theory of Religion," *JAAR* 88.4 (2020): 956.

54. See a helpful discussion of the productive use of anachronism in Daniel R. Huebner, "Anachronism: The Queer Pragmatics of Understanding the Past in the Present," *The American Sociologist* 52 (2021): 740–61.

55. Maldonado-Torres, "Race, Religion, and Ethics."

lutionary movements (EZLN in Chiapas, MST in Brazil, or the Sandinista movement in Nicaragua), was a critic of the secularizing aspects of Marxism as much as the colonial dimensions of capitalism. Despite the brutal reality of colonization and the imposition of official religion "The Indian has not renounced his old myths. His sense of the mystical dimension has changed. His animism subsists.… he has not renounced his conception of life that does not question Reason but Nature. The three jircas, the three hills of Huánuco, weigh more on the conscience of the Huanuqueño Indian than the Christian afterlife."[56] An Yountae sees a religious critique of religion in this decolonial strand, but one that sees religion as an essential force for decolonial thought and praxis.

As Quijano has shown, colonialism is intrinsic to modernity.[57] Since Christian theology provided the ideology for the conquest, it is the task of the decolonial enterprise to account for the emergence of secularism in the process of coloniality. Maldonado-Torres offers here a critique that applies directly to the biblical studies episteme. He notes that "defenders of secularism have invested more time passionately attacking religion than critiquing the forms of subjugation that are constitutive of the modern state."[58] He also reads secularism's takeover of Christianity/theology as an intraimperial event, a shifting from the colonized as soulless to the subjugated as uncivilized. Maldonado-Torres argues that secularism/colonialism ended up rejecting religion not so much because religion was imperial "but simply because it was not imperial enough."[59] Admittedly, such a shift should not be interpreted as defending the idea that secularism left imperial religion behind; rather, secularism recasts its inherent division between the sacred and the profane as civility and uncivility, knowledge and opinion, reason and fanaticism, and so on. In the process, Judaism

56. "El indio no ha renegado sus viejos mitos. Su sentimiento místico ha variado. Su animismo subsiste.… No ha renunciado a su propia concepción de la vida que no interroga a la Razón sino a la Naturaleza. Los tres jircas, los tres cerros de Huánuco, pesan en la conciencia del indio huanuqueño más que la ultratumba cristiana" (José Carlos Mariategui, *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad Peruana* [Barcelona: Linkgua ediciones, 1928]: 290). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

57. Quijano, "Coloniality of Power."

58. Maldonado-Torres, "Secularism and Religion in the Modern Colonial World-System: From Secular Postcoloniality to Postsecular Transmodernity," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 366.

59. Maldonado-Torres, "Secularism and Religion," 367.

is cast as a legalistic religion and Islam as embedded in violence: "only in Europe one finds the last and more complete expression of the religious, out of which a properly rational civilization can emerge."[60] Jürgen Habermas, on the side of modernity, and his model of communicative rationality epitomizes such a process. Gianni Vattimo, on the side of postmodernity, and his notion of "weak thought" would represent a reverse side and the death of a metanarrative that opens the door back to religion, one "that gave legitimacy and impetus to the imperialism of the first modernity."[61]

In light of such observations, historicism leaves unaddressed the complex links between (post)modernity and colonialism. An epistemic shift centered on expanding the primary and secondary sources, democratizing access to the guild's table, and particularizing historicism is indeed an urgent task. However, such an enterprise remains at the epiphenomenal level unless we interrogate the constitutive elements of what passes as valid and rigorous knowledge. In the words of Santos, historicism offers a nonabyssal solution to an abyssal problem. Since historicism has relegated religion/theology to a subepistemological dimension, biblical studies both feeds from and generates a type of secularism that reinforces its whiteness. Even in the case of postcolonial thought, religion has come to stand in opposition to rationality. Maldonado-Torres criticizes Said and Spivak for equating religion with the obscure. Once again Maldonado-Torres offers an insightful note: "My point is not that secularism is purely the West's invention, but that more often than not the accent on the secular helps to maintain the West's epistemic hegemony."[62] To bring it back to biblical studies, Western investment in secular critique—even as it surreptitiously infiltrates all types of theological assumptions into exegesis—functions as a gatekeeping device that reassures its own rigor and downgrades, ignores, or dismisses explicitly theological projects. Fascinatingly, secular critique in biblical studies further typecasts any type of nonhistoricist understanding as religiously grounded or theologically informed.

Biblical Ways of Knowing in the Global South

The philosophical and epistemological project drafted in Epistemologies of the South, with its engraved decolonial take on religious/theological

60. Maldonado-Torres, "Secularism and Religion," 369.
61. Maldonado-Torres, "Secularism and Religion," 375.
62. Maldonado-Torres, "Secularism and Religion," 378.

knowledge as an ethos of interpretation invested in political commitments, does not disqualify objectivistic/historicist paradigms hegemonic in the Global North. Rather, it contextualizes Western epistemological investments within a holistic approach to knowledge. In this vein, biblical scholarship would be global not for its virtual multiculturalism and/or multiracialism but because it would not filter knowledge through its Western lenses. Such a project, utopian as it might be, disrupts the temporal metanarrative that modernity and postmodernity in the West, and its subsequent investment in secular critique, have overcome confessional, religious, or theological commitments. Secular critique in its modernist version, with a callous investment in historicism, or in its postmodern variety, with an allegedly avant-garde resort to high critical theory, have expunged biblical criticism from confessional commitments: dogmatic ascriptions belong either to ecclesial settings or to ideologically invested scholars. Although I am the first to welcome the benefits of bracketing church influence from knowledge production, a decolonial approach suggests that, by denying theology a green card in the biblical country, we have impoverished the range of epistemological options. We throw away the baby with the bathwater.

A decolonial critique of epistemological commitments brings back into the fold the diverse ways in which scholars from the Global South have been doing and continue to perform biblical critique. On this front, Latin American liberation theology offers a fitting paradigm to explore how epistemologies of the South have been playing in what the Global North would consider its backyard. The term backyard here has several connotations. In terms of the sociology of knowledge, it refers to how the centers of production (reputable academic journals and presses) consistently ignore contributions from the Global South. In terms of citation politics, it signals how scholars in the West routinely overlook scholarship in the South. In terms of heuristical concerns, it points at how scholarly research agendas whitewash the political edge of emancipatory hermeneutics.

A recap of the theoretical journeys of Latin American liberation theology remains beyond the scope of the present chapter. My goal here, rather, is first to place other ways of knowing as foundational to the task of criticism and then to illustrate how the theological realm contributes to the ethico-political ethos that drives the hermeneutical task. This paradigm's main contribution consists of prioritizing "the eruption of the poor" in theological thought and exegetical analysis. Methodologically speaking,

liberation theology embodies an epistemology that takes the material analysis of the impoverished conditions of the Majority World as its starting point. What does it mean, such research agenda asks, to interpret the Bible in a global context in which two-thirds of the population experience deprivation? Such an ethical impulse—constitutive at the heuristical, hermeneutical, methodological, and teleological levels—strips the political naïveté from the historicist's research agendas. To be specific, Western biblical scholarship bypasses authors such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, Jorge Pixley, Jose María Castillo, González Faus, Elsa Támez, Ivone Guebara, Juan José Tamayo, and Marcela Althaus-Reid because their contributions do not fit the criteria set up by objectivism, scientificism, historicism, and secularism. The broader call for biblical studies, as Epistemologies of the South would have it, is to address pressing global problems such as the disarming of grassroots movements, the collapse of any alternative system to neoliberal dominance, the rise of far-right totalitarianism, the relentless advance of surveillance capitalism, the inevitable ecological crisis, the ascent of white supremacy, and so on. These issues are not merely political problems; they pose epistemological challenges. Subsequently, a decolonial approach has as its main impetus a questioning of the very foundations that we have taken for granted in knowledge production. [63]

Let me briefly consider two recent works in this vein. The goal here is not to deepen our knowledge of ancient contexts but rather to survey what are the likes of "a tone," "an ethos," "an episteme" that departs from historicism, embracing political enterprises, manifesting ideological commitments, and projecting utopian futures. In a recent collaborative effort, "La fuerza de los pequeños" seeks a communal reflection of theological realities issuing from the South:

63. As Gustavo Gutiérrez ("Expanding the View," in *Expanding the View: Gustavo Gutiérrez and the Future of Liberation Theology*, ed. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990)], 5) puts it, "Black, Hispanic, and Amerindian theologies in the United States, theologies arising in the complex contexts of Africa, Asia and the South Pacific, and the especially fruitful thinking of those who have adopted the feminist perspective—all these have meant that for the first time in many centuries, theology is being done outside the customary European and North American centers. The result of the so-called First World has been a new kind of dialogue between traditional thinking and new thinking. In addition, outside the Christian sphere, efforts are underway to develop liberation theologies from Jewish and Muslim perspectives."

> To contribute to our people's transformational and liberating processes, interpreting faithfully and critically our historical present and rediscovering the mystical and prophetical elements in liberation theology, we seek to enact a systemic change and an ecclesial renewal from an intergenerational synergy.[64]

The authors locate their project as a political, ethical, theological—even ecclesial—enterprise through and through. This is a contemporary recasting of the original liberation theological project. Methodologically, as expected, it starts with an analysis of the historical, economical, and cultural situation of the Latin American continent. Historically defined by colonialism, economically determined by the North's expropriation of natural resources, and culturally informed by a population embedded in ecclesial structures, the material reality of the subcontinent centers the hermeneutical endeavor. Similar to how minoritized scholarship in the USA resorts to critical theory to disrupt historicism's sticky assumptions, the Global South—Latin America, in this case—renders mainstream distinctions, on this side of the abyssal line, between exegesis and hermeneutics, theology and critical analysis, historical research and political commitments inconsequential.[65]

The heuristical, hermeneutical, and methodological point of analysis is "the least of these" (Matt 25:40). On this front, let me quote Elsa Támez:

> Biblical scientism alone is not enough to account for the immensity and the absences we experience. In our hermeneutics there is passion and compassion, dimensions that the academy overlooks but that are impor-

64. "Contribuir a los procesos de transformación y liberación de nuestros pueblos, leyendo en clave creyente y critica el momento histórico que vivimos y redescubriendo los resortes místico-proféticos y metodológicos de la teología de la liberación, que pueden impulsar un cambio sistémico y una renovación eclesial desde una sinergia intergeneracional" (Pablo Bonavía, "Sinergia intergeneracional y teología de la liberación," in *La fuerza de los pequeños: Hacer teología de la liberación desde las nuevas resistencias y esperanzas*, ed. Francisco Aquino Júnior, Geraldina Céspedes, and Alejandro Ortiz Cotte [Montevideo: Fundación Amerindia, 2020], 11).

65. For instance, Isabel Iñiguez ("Construimos Teología de la Liberación desde las Nuevas Resistencias y Esperanzas," in Aquino Júnior, Céspedes, and Ortiz Cotte *La fuerza de los pequeños*, 173–83) names three fissures (*grietas*) as the starting point of analysis: (1) the structural fissure of the earth (ecological crisis); (2) the structural fissure of expropriation (geopolitically based appropriation); and (3) the fissure of the accumulation gap.

> tant to capture truth. Words that are 'soaked in mystery' are like magic as they warm our hearts and minds and propel us to seek a life worth living for everyone.[66]
>
> In Latin American and Caribbean biblical hermeneutics, the quotidian and concrete, lived out in different contexts, is our starting point for biblical analysis. This is where we find the light, our lamps that illuminate the biblical texts that, in turn, also become new lamps.[67]

Támez epitomizes how an epistemology of the South manifests in the biblical realm, both in its descriptive and normative dimensions.[68] Such an approach entwines the concrete and the abstract, the historical and the ethical, the theoretical and the practical, the critical and the theological, activism and scholarship. It yokes onto the exegetical enterprise what I would call the inescapable burden of reality. Historicism will likely object that such dimensional conflations obscure the study of original contexts, rehearse long-gone theological commitments, and reduce hermeneutics to politics and ethics. In this case, objectivism, secularism, and scientificism—a triad of value-laden investments undergirding historicism—turn into totalitarianism and, in the telling of Santos, evince epistemicidal inclinations because they invalidate any knowledge outside what they consider rigorous scholarship. These disciplinary prohibitions not only shore up whiteness; they also sanction coloniality, patriarchy, and classism.

Although Epistemologies of the South comes late in the game in the development of liberation theologies, it provides a strategic foundation to situate contextual emancipatory hermeneutics broadly understood

66. Elsa Támez, *Bajo un cielo sin estrellas: Lecturas y meditaciones bíblicas* (Sabnilla: Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones, 2001), 20: "La sola ciencia bíblica no es suficiente para dar razón de la inmensidad o de la ausencia que experimentamos. En nuestra hermenéutica hay Pasion y Compasion; dos dimensiones humanas marginadas en la academia, pero que también son maneras de penetrar la verdad de las cosas. Son esas palabras "húmedas de misterio" que como arte de magia calientan los corazones—y la cabeza—, y dan animo en la lucha por la vida digna para todos y todas."

67. Támez, *Bajo un cielo sin estrellas*, 22: "En la hermenéutica bíblica latinoamericana y caribeña, la vida concreta y sensual, vivida en los diferentes contextos particulares, es el punto de partida para el análisis bíblico. Y aquí descubrimos también luces, lámparas que nos llevan a la Biblia e iluminan textos que a la vez se convierten en lámparas."

68. Támez, *Bajo un cielo sin estrellas*, 26.

within global markets of knowledge. This framing further allows biblical hermeneutics to skip some of the methodological traps that await the critic as she navigates the interpretive relationships between past and present, text and interpreter, historical reconstruction and ethical relevance. And, since we are in the thick of it, the epistemological critique offers an open-ended model for the critics in the Global North—me being an assistant professor of New Testament at Boston University—to venture into a world beyond dominant epistemologies. As I understand it, the task here is broad in scope and wide in reach. Rita Felski wittingly notices that to "immerse oneself in the last few decades of literary and cultural studies is … to be caught up in a dizzying whirlwind of ideas, arguments, and world pictures."[69] Rather than flattening out these spiraling movements, I suggest we should run with them.

Let's face it: the inclination of the biblical scholar *as scholar* is inherently conservative.[70] As I show in the following chapters (especially chs. 3, 4, and 7), the academic—usually writing from her desk, cup of coffee in hand—is ill-equipped to think about contemporary crises as they affect the most vulnerable.[71] Although I have an extensive activist career in the areas of HIV, incarceration, immigration, and homelessness—paired with personal experience—I also have a comfortable tenure-track job at a research university. My point here is that critics ought to expand the experiences that become available to them. Cultural studies, with its attention to subcultures of meaning production and consumption, fits the task at hand. A partial solution to the epistemological crisis demands that interpreters tend to different types of experiences without appropriating and extracting from them.

69. Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, 20.

70. Wimbush, *Black Flesh Matters*, 1–19.

71. Despite notable contributions ranging from the 1990s into the early 2000s, autobiographical biblical criticism as such has mostly disappeared; see Janice Capel Anderson and Jeffrey L. Staley, eds., *Taking It Personally: Autobiographical Biblical Criticism*, *Semeia* 72 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); Fiona C. Black, ed., *The Recycled Bible: Autobiography, Culture, and the Space Between*, SemeiaSt 51 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006); Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, *Autobiographical Biblical Criticism: Between Text and Self* (Leiden: Deo, 2002); Philip R. Davies, ed., *First Person: Essays in Biblical Autobiography* (New York: Sheffield Academic, 2002); Robert Paul Seesengood, *Competing Identities: The Athlete and the Gladiator in Early Christianity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

The Paths Ahead

No straight lines exist between a scholar's location and identity and her scholarly production.[72] The evidence, however, remains overwhelming: biblical scholarship has not even started to touch the other side of the abyssal line. The project of multiracial biblical studies proves that the vast majority of authors and sources cited in biblical scholarship are white. The epistemological crisis shows that scholars from the Global South are grossly underrepresented and that the current criteria for knowledge production disqualifies them as "less than" any hermeneutical approach disinvested in historicism, scientificism, and objectivism. Despite self-identified references to the "global" or the "international," biblical scholarship knows little about African, Asian, or Latin American knowledge production. On this side of the abyssal line, biblical studies mirrors the contexts and responds to the questions of white, Euro-American, cis, and straight male, middle-class interpreters.[73]

This book seeks to make a modest contribution by imagining New Testament studies otherwise. It rehearses a discipline concerned with contemporary problems, crises, and agendas, rather than with the traditional disciplinary concerns. In the always delicate balance of interpreting the past, New Testament studies has veered exceedingly toward understanding history on its own terms, forgetful that any reconstruction of the past inevitably assumes a working definition of the present, oblivious that the production of knowledge should tend to the concerns of its audiences and constituencies. As scholars, we are socialized into a discipline that rewards disinterest, objectivity, and disinvestment in the present, and we become oblivious to the fact that we belong in a world full of contradictions, crises, and on the verge of collapse.

72. On this front I find Madhavi Menon's (*Indifference to Difference* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015], 2–24) denunciation of identitarian knowledge particularly convincing.

73. Francisco Lozada Jr., "New Testament Interpretation in the United States: Perspectives from a Cultural Observer," in *Reading the New Testament in the Manifold Contexts of a Globalized World: Exegetical Perspectives*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker, Jens Herzer, Angela Standhartinger, and Florian Wilk, Neutestamentliche Entwürfe zur Theologie 32 (Tübingen: Francke, 2022), https://doi.org/10.24053/9783772057656 209–225.

Contextuality may take several paths. In the Global North, contextual hermeneutics has tended to wed identity-based claims,[74] while the Global South has veered toward a problem-centered approach. Both tendencies are, of course, a matter of emphasis rather than exclusivity. As explained in the previous sections, this book centers on crises rather than identities, on problems rather than subjectivities. Nonetheless, the task at hand remains fraught. Most of us writing from the North-Western hemisphere have been socialized and disciplined in historicism (German roots) or literary criticism (high theory). Success in the academy entails mastering historical-critical methods of interpretation and producing a type of knowledge that is disseminated preferably in certain types of journals and academic presses.[75] There are, however, other disciplinary stories to be told. On this front, my contribution is nothing new. It simply draws from what I consider the nuclear contribution of Latin American liberation theology: interpretation starts with analyzing contemporary contexts.

Locating contemporary crises as the hermeneutical starting point impacts the book's layout. The book explores different sections of the New Testament following a canonical order (Synoptics, John, Acts, and Pauline letters). A cultural studies approach, however, nuances this traditional arrangement by underlining thematic connections rather than their sequential disposition. Although the book moves through the canon "as it is,"[76] it focuses on how such a canonical setup creates a constellation of reflections around contemporary political and cultural crises, showing

74. Stephen Moore and Yvonne Sherwood (*Invention of the Biblical Scholar*, 118) sharply notice how these approaches from the margins "can easily be accommodated to the democratic ethos of the discipline … and accorded a place in it—precisely on its margins, where they can be both visible from the mainstream of the discipline and extraneous to it, and need have no deep or lasting effect on how mainstream practitioners of biblical scholarship go about their daily business."

75. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Kent Harold Richards, eds., *Transforming Graduate Biblical Education: Ethos and Discipline*, GPBS 10 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010).

76. This is one instance, among several, where I have felt the pull of historicism. By arranging the chapters following a canonical order, interpretation reifies the notion that biblical meaning shall remain contained, definable, and delimited. I am also aware of the disciplinary and institutional restrictions imposed on junior biblical scholars who ought to navigate staying recognizable as "biblical" in the job market and the guild even as they stretch the boundaries of what counts as recognizable scholarship. I thank Jacqueline Hidalgo for this insight.

how resonances in one passage echo meanings in other unrelated texts. Since literary and historical connections are brought together through cultural topics and works of art, the result is a cacophony/polyphony of intercontextual references, a vision of the New Testament as a soundboard reaching into our presents and futures. To say it with Santos, the interpretive task from the perspective of the Epistemologies of the South is to develop a postabyssal critical apparatus "in which the mixture of knowledges, cultures, subjectivities, and practices subverts the abyssal line that grounds the epistemologies of the North."[77]

The reader will notice that there are few to no references to issues that continue to frame our discipline's ethos: authorial intention, intended audience, implied author and reader, rhetoric as persuasion, visions of justification and righteousness, ethnicity, and gender in antiquity; nor are there reflections on the imperial or anti-imperial nature of the canon. These all are esteemed topics worthy of scholarly pursuit and deserving of further academic engagement. Still, I suggest that biblical scholars continue to diversify the discipline beyond its historicist moorings. To this end, let me now foreground the role of cultural studies.

77. Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, 107.