

# ○ 'WHO ARE YOU CALLING "STUPID"?'

## ETHNOCENTRIC HUMOUR AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCT IN THE COLONIAL DISCOURSE OF JUDGES 3.12-30

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Despite the uncritical consumption of sacred writ that tends to 'forget' in the wake of its cultural ethno-typing effects, this essay 're-members' the double consciousness repressed by/in history in order to emphasise coloniser/d alike as 'other'. After consideration of the ethnocentric humour of Judges 3 and its possible sociological functions, I will explore the appropriation of this ideological 'history' rife with stereotypes (e.g. 'stupid') within the colonial nexus of sixth century BCE Yehud and nineteenth century CE North American Tejas with contemporary ramifications. My analyses will demonstrate that the coloniser, immigrant by nature, uses this discourse to re-present its identity as 'Israel' (and 'indigenous') all the while divinely legitimating its superiority through projected stereotypes and establishing its control of land claims through a national history that privileges its voice over that of the 'other'. But coloniser/d share more than just history and space; they share an identity, 'us' as essentially like 'them' – 'Israelites' like Mexicans, Euro-Americans like Moabites.

Immigrants flood the borders in waves on what must seem to the locals like a daily basis as shifting demographics reveal. One town reports that the immigrants have dominated the population 200:10. In another area, population estimates place the ratio at 10:1.

Opinions are certainly diverse on the issue. Many have expressed concern over immigrants assuming certain rights and property, and isolating themselves from the culture. But not everyone has taken such a dim view. One individual stated that the foreigners 'are about to overrun us, of which I am very glad, for the country needs immigration in order to make progress'. And yet another spoke about immigration's positive benefits, not least of which would include enhanced commerce: 'I cannot help seeing advantages which to my way of thinking would result if we admitted honest, hard-working people regardless of what country they came from... even hell itself'. Nonetheless, some locals look upon the diligent work ethic of the immigrants with suspicion despite the positive economic impact.

Emotions run high as fear and distrust give way to racial prejudice expressed in slurs that only proliferate with increased contact between the two groups over the years of immigration. Each group stereotypes the other as uneducated and stupid, which, in turn, only reinforces attitudes of superiority. Sentiments such as 'Go back home where you came from' by the natives only betray an ignorance that the immigrants have done just that.

## INTRODUCTION

What reads like a story<sup>1</sup> ripped from the headlines in modern Southwest America actually reflects the early nineteenth century socio-cultural context of ethnic antipathy amidst Anglo colonisation of the Mexican province of Tejas (now Texas) with echoes perhaps of sixth century B. C. E. colonisation of the Persian province of Yehud. The current imbroglio over Latino immigration inflamed by racial stereotypes<sup>2</sup> bears a note of irony given E. Renan's observation, 'Forgetting is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation' (quoted in Bhabha 1990, 11). The postcolonial

perspective of this paper, however, re-members by exploring the mimicry of Judges 3.12-30 (Eglon – Ehud episode) as ethnic slur and its co-opted colonial discursive function constructing identities in Yehud and Tejas.

Complicit in the act of dis-membering, literature helps construct a national mythology disseminating colonialist ideology. We all know that literature, much like the seemingly dismissible phenomenon of joking, has certain effects; we just tend to ignore them. Ethnic joking and racist stereotypes within literature have the effect of splitting colonial discourse. On the one hand, it enables a process of mimicry, the sign of double articulation that re-presents in terms of ‘otherness’ by disavowing reality for a product of desire.<sup>3</sup> But ‘every culture is haunted by its other’ (Derrida 1984, 116) as such stereotypical re-presentations betray the anxiety within the coloniser’s sense of self-identity, thus undermining identity.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the process of mimicry enables the transformation of joking as a form of resistance to colonial discourse. Through mimicry, the colonised reflects back the coloniser’s gaze to remind the coloniser that the colonised is a subject too (Bhabha 1994, 126).

The permissible act of ‘forgetting’ becomes crucial in the creation of a national narrative. Through the perpetuity of ethnic stereotypes in public discourse, national mythology privileges one ethnic group by overpowering the narrative(s) of other ethnic groups and, in effect, suppressing that nation’s own origin(s) and the voices of its ‘other’. Judges 3 as a focal text illumines the problematic discourse of ethnocentric humour in a text reinforced by but reinforcing an overarching ideology in a national myth deemed sacred. Postcolonial analyses probe the *nachleben* (the ongoing effects of a biblical text upon readers and communities across time) (Kille 2001, 140) of such literature that: (1) one ethnicity co-opts in a colonial context of identity construction (sociological functions of ethnic humour reveal the projection of the ‘stupid’ stereotype by one ethnic group onto another in the construal of its identity as superior, as ‘Israel’);<sup>5</sup> and (2) sanctions same ethnic group’s sense of entitlement to power over the ‘other’.<sup>6</sup> Within the colonial nexus, ancient and modern colonists alike appropriated the ethnocentric Exile-Conquest-Settlement motif and its attendant ethnic bias (i.e. Judges 3) in their re-presentation of themselves as ‘Israel’ and the colonised as ‘other’ in the creation of national myth. Currently in the US, Latino immigration concerns signal the latent anxiety within the coloniser’s self-identity made more acute ideologically as ‘us’ looks like ‘them’, ‘Israelites’ like Moabites, Euroamericans like Mexicans. Differences between ethnic groups are essentially *constructed* differences (Bhabha 1994, 64): ‘To be different from those that are different makes you the same’.

## ANALYSIS OF SATIRE IN JUDGES 3.12-30

Though scholarship agrees on the presence of humour in this story, the same can not be said of its centrality or efficacy. Here, I will only spotlight those elements that mark this story as satire and contribute to its cultural ethno-typing.

Consistent with the literary frame of the episodic judges’ narratives, God subjects the Israelites to foreign domination because of their evil though with one noticeable exception: while other conquerors need only have YHWH ‘sell’ (*mkr*, 3.8; 4.2; 10.7) or ‘deliver’ (*ntn*, 6.1; 13.1) the Israelites to them because of their strength, YHWH must first strengthen (*hzq*) the weak king Eglon of Moab and even that does not suffice since he requires Ammonite *and* Amalekite assistance in order to capture a single city. The stock characterisation (i.e. ‘stupid’ and ‘clever/canny’ character)

central to this story's humour portrays Eglon as 'stupid' and Ehud as 'canny'. Ehud demonstrates planning, trickery, and cleverness – i.e. the 'word of (the) god(s)' pun – that easily manipulates Eglon who, unsuspecting the meaning to the pun, becomes the stupid foil to Ehud's brilliance.

Sacrificial motifs contribute to stock characterization as well (see Alter 1981; Amit 1989; and Brettler 1995, 81–82). In addition to the name Eglon ('*glwn*) punning 'calf' ('*gl*), the narrator emphasises Eglon's corpulence (vv. 17, 22). Verses 17-18 even utilise animal sacrifice terminology for Ehud offering tribute (*wyqrb 't hmnhb*). Ironically, the 'implicit etymologising' of Eglon underscores him as an unwitting sacrificial 'offering' (Alter 1981, 39). Even the depiction of the sacrificial knife and the graphic disembowelment of this 'fatted calf' reinforce the sacrificial motif.

Sexual imagery permeates with provocative connotations. Usage of 'to open' and 'locked' in a disproportionate space for opening and closing doors (vv. 23-25) are anchored in sexual metaphors (cf. SS 5.2; 4.12). Ehud's short, straight sword (v. 16) functions as a phallic symbol. The expression 'come to' (v. 20), in reference to Ehud's approach to Eglon, occurs elsewhere in Hebrew literature for sexual intercourse. And, the story's formulaic ending departs from the norm with the inclusion of 'hand' (v. 30; cf. Judg. 8.28), a euphemism for the penis. Such imagery depicts 'the grotesque feminisation' (Alter 1981, 39) of Eglon and the domination of the Moabites in strikingly sexual terms.

Stupid and fat traits characterising Eglon extend to the Moabites. First, the clever exit strategy of Ehud (vv. 23-24) contrasts vividly with silly Moabite inaction. One wonders if these Moabite guards have much going for them when they think nothing amiss about their king going to the toilet with a messenger in attendance. The point strengthens with the use of scatology in this 'toilet joke' that reduces its corpulent victim to a pile of manure. The guards recognise the feces but fail to comprehend; they 'waste' time talking about the king's 'activity' to the point of embarrassment only to find their lord dead once they open the doors (vv. 24-25).

Second, the joke's climax arrives with the mobilisation of the Moabite army. The corpulence and fate of Eglon portends that of the Moabites – like king, like people. The stupidity of the Moabites attains to an even more ridiculous level as the story ends with the mighty Moabite army having been slain by the Israelites who had controlled access to the fords of the Jordan River (vv. 28-29). How stupid must an army be to suffer 100 per cent fatalities in the battlefield? Such clear hyperbole marks the crescendo of the narrative presentation of stupid Moabites bested by superior Israelites described by L. Handy (1992, 241) as 'one dumb Moabite, two dumb Moabites, ten thousand dumb Moabites'.

This stock characterisation of the Moabites and the Israelites consistently appears throughout the Hebrew Bible with Israelite perception of their neighbors as nothing but derogatory.<sup>7</sup> Rooted in incest (Gen. 19.29-38), Moab, in complicity with Ammon (Deut. 23.3), sought to impede the Hebrews' entrance into Canaan by hiring a prophet to curse them only for the plan to backfire (Num. 22-25), but are most noted for their religious rituals of child sacrifice (2 Ki. 3.4-27). Their partnership with Amalek,<sup>8</sup> who also sought to impede the Hebrews' entrance into Canaan (Exod. 17.8-16), certainly does not bode favorably for them. Even the prophets have nothing kind to say about the Moabites (e.g. Isa. 15-16; Jer. 48; Ezek. 25.8-11; Amos 2.1-3; Zeph. 2.9). Despite consistent disparagement of the Moabites as 'stupid' in biblical literature, B. Webb (1987, 130) nevertheless attempts to salvage Moabite reputation when stating, 'the point is not that Eglon,

his courtiers, and his troops were all blundering incompetents'. If so, then why characterise *this* ethnic group *only* in a manner consistent with that elsewhere in Hebrew literature? The 18 years of Moabite rule, to which Webb appeals, has nothing to do with Moabite shrewdness and everything to do with YHWH's strength. Handy's response to Webb that 'the point is that the whole cast of Moabites are blundering incompetents' at least begins to anticipate the ramifications of ethnic slurs within sacred literature (Handy 1992, 242 fn 24).

In spite of M. Brettler's claim that this story 'was appreciated as humorous in antiquity' (Brettler 1995, 85), such humour falls shy of pure entertainment with its ethnocentrism positioning the Moabites as the butt of its joke. Ethnic markers linked with stock stereotypes give this satire a definite colonialist, if not also nationalist (loosely understood), dimension with its distinction of one ethnic group from another and competing claims of political subjugation of one group by another. The contextual placement of the satirist's nation among other nations reinforces an exalted sense of nationhood while verifying its identity by representing distorted images of the other, satirised nation. Positive and negative modes of national feeling – namely the celebration of characteristics of one's nation and the mockery of those of others – bear a cyclical connection: mockery intensifies celebration; celebration motivates mockery.

My concern with this story's colonialist dimension is not with the nation Israel but rather with a community identifying itself as 'Israel' and the sociological functions of such humour for an 'ingroup'.<sup>9</sup> Ideological perspectives on nationalistic satire can shed an invaluable insight in that, sometimes, they enable a nation to look critically at itself in the guise of another. According to C. Knight (2004, 63), 'the presence of national stereotypes is the manifestation of national shortcomings'. Guilt is never admitted but rather projected onto the enemy. Attacking foreign values becomes the pretense whereby nationalistic satire can attack local values by projecting its country's values onto another. While Judges 3 (v. 12) unequivocally admits the guilt of Israel, it also portrays them as 'canny' contra the 'stupid' Moabites. One wonders though how shrewd and canny a group of people can be who keep acting in a manner resulting in their own political subjugation? Sounds a little – well – stupid. And what of the functions of such literature that ostensibly depicts Moab alone as the 'stupid' ethnic group?

## **SOCIOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS OF ETHNIC HUMOUR**

Before exploring potential sociological functions of ethnic humour, I readily acknowledge that no one potential function can or should account for the diversity present in the relationship dynamic where such humour occurs.<sup>10</sup> While the research on ethnic humour within the sciences is distinctively diverse, functional theories of ethnic humour are, admittedly, merely hypotheses that cannot be tested. That being said, some of the conclusions drawn from ethnic humour research within social contexts vis-à-vis the canny/stupid stereotype are nonetheless germane for understanding potential function(s) of the ethnic humour in Judges 3.

Ethnic jokes, especially of the canny/stupid type, enjoy enormous popularity in most western countries. C. Davies' cross-cultural research notes the integral role language plays in determining the jokers from the butts and defining their relationship to one another. The joke-tellers are almost always a culturally and linguistically *dominant* group who regard the speech of the butts of their jokes as a distorted version of their own. Nonetheless, the mocked group is not alien to the joke-tellers; rather, they are a part of the same linguistic and cultural family, albeit on the periphery.<sup>11</sup>

Rarely are ethnic jokes about stupidity told about groups totally different or alien to the joke-tellers. Moab, a close neighbor with linguistic and cultural relations (second cousin to Israel/Jacob with Abraham as a great uncle to their ancestral father Moab) though on the Palestinian margins, becomes the 'stupid' people in Israelite perception. 'They' get depicted as a 'stupid' likeness of 'us', a distorted version of the joke-teller's own self-image (Davies 1987, 39–42; Davies 1990, 44).

One potential function of this ethnic joke about 'stupid' Moabites is the establishment of boundaries. According to Davies (1982, 384), all ethnic groups have two important sets of boundaries.

The first are the social and geographical boundaries of the group that define who is a member and who is not. The second are the moral boundaries of the group which define what is acceptable and characteristic behaviour of the members, and what is unacceptable behaviour characteristic of outsiders.

Ethnic jokes about stupidity define the social boundaries where values conflict by isolating groups (Davies 1990, 390, 401 fn 22). G. Cromer (2001, 191) points out, 'The other is always the medium by which a society demarcates its own cultural space and boundaries'. By telling such jokes about stupidity, the ingroup reassures its members that such a path is reserved for 'them', the *other* people living on the periphery, and not for 'us' (Davies 1990, 386–387).

A second function of ethnic humour is that of superiority. Any group may use ethnic humour as a means to malign other groups, thus enabling a feeling of superiority illusory though it may be (Feinberg 1972, 60). In this process, such humour provides an outlet to 'increase the morale and solidify the ingroup [and]... introduce or foster a hostile disposition toward that outgroup' (Martineau 1972, 118–119).<sup>12</sup> In a similar vein, Apte (1985, 142) comments on the effects upon a group's self-image from regarding others as inferior: 'Prejudice reinforces ethnocentrism, just as negation of the cultural values of other peoples nurtures self-esteem and feelings of superiority'. Moreover, such a portrayal may reflect what J. Kristeva (1991, 20) refers to as 'the hidden face of our identity' in a process of demonising the other,<sup>13</sup> which, according to H. Befu (1999, 26), demonstrates 'human infallibility... and the inability to be morally strong and to deal honestly with one's own weaknesses'. An unwillingness to acknowledge unacceptable traits among the joke-teller's own ethnic group enables them to project such traits that they wish to remain on the moral periphery of their culture onto groups who inhabit the social or geographical periphery of their culture. At best, this process of demonising the other in ethnic humour provides excellent indices of the nature of the group laughing.

### **COLONIAL CONTEXTUALISATIONS OF JUDGES 3**

Given this satire's possible sociological functions and its cultural ethno-typing, what can we conclude about the nature of the group(s) consuming such ethnocentric humour? And what about the *nachleben* ('afterlife') of an ethnocentric text in concert with an overarching Conquest-Settlement ideology? Concerns with its *nachleben* enable what traditional suppositions of satire (i.e. intrinsically moral/didactic) cannot – namely, to ameliorate its effects. The mutual consumption of such ethnocentric literature can never be harmless despite its humour. Distressing to its victim, such satire narcotises readers who tolerate such depersonalisation. Knight (2004, 25)

comments, ‘The act of consuming is self-consciously represented by the object we consume, and by eating it we transform the image into reality... the process of reading transforms the satiric representation of experience into the personal experience of those who read it’.

### COLONISATION, IMMIGRATION AND YEHUD

The embedment of this story in a literary corpus advancing claims of divine right to land (‘to Judah’, Judg. 1.1-2; reaffirmed in 20.18) would be of especial relevance for an ingroup trying to establish its political authority contested in a land not theirs – i.e. a context of immigration. Even the issue of intermarriage expressed via the endogamy/exogamy motif (Judg. 1.11-15/3.1-5) speaks an immigrant group’s concern with self-identity. This struggle to wrest political control of a land by displacing its indigenous population amidst concerns of self-identity altogether presuppose (1) a context for the re-presentation of this literature’s ideology by a Jewish group in a significant manner and (2) a context of mobility for this Jewish group with imperial sponsorship in the ancient Near East. The Persian colonial context of the imperially sponsored culture of Yehud as the material context for the consumption, if not production,<sup>14</sup> of this national mythology seems most reasonable (see Berquist 1995, 55, 133–134; Grabbe 1992, 97–99). Successive waves of immigrant elites, perhaps descended from those Judeans deported by Babylon in the early sixth century B. C. E, embraced Persian ideology and promoted their identity as ‘true Jews’ perhaps because the Persians told them so and they may have believed it to be so (Davies 1995, 112).

Significant markers toward a contextualisation of this text’s consumption would be concerns over land claims and group identity vis-à-vis intermarriage. Despite the tendentiousness of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, they still remain principal sources for insight into how a particular group construed its own identity in a mid-to-late fifth century (or perhaps later),<sup>15</sup> Yehud context. This group understood their collective identity according to the programmatic script as ‘Israel’ coming from exile, hence as ‘returnees’ or immigrants. Successive waves of these immigrants into Yehud consequently led to internecine conflict between Yehudite groups: descendants of those land-owning exiled Judeans with land claims, perhaps with titles in hand, and the peasants who, remaining, quietly assumed control of same land by right of their 50 years of sweat. Those not part of the ingroup who understood their identity in terms of the programmatic script, regardless of ethnic ties, belonged to the outgroup.

Further complicating the lines of conflict between the two groups were intermarriages among them in the 75–100 years prior to Nehemiah.<sup>16</sup> To marry outside the ingroup was tantamount to marrying a foreigner, despite the fact that some of the ‘people of the land’ were, ironically, ethnic Jews and YHWH devotees. The immigrant group assumed the power of naming those belonging to the *golah* (Exile) community, or ‘self’, and those belonging to the disenfranchised, or ‘other’.

By referring to the local non-*golah* Judaeans as ‘peoples of the land(s)’, the returning exiles effectively classified their Judaeans rivals, together with the neighboring non-Judaeans peoples (Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, residents of Samaria, etc.) as alien to Israel (Washington 1994, 232–233).

Amalekite, Ammonite, Moabite mattered not; anyone not part of the ingroup was just an (other) typ(olog)ical Canaanite. Construction of the identity of the 'other' accompanies, even precedes, some might argue, that of 'self'. Only within a context of ethnic conflict over power struggles for land claims/rights and where ethnic purity concerns among the ruling elite dominate would such a bawdy text with its conquest-settlement ideological thematic motivate an immigrant (out)group, clearly in the demographic minority, to assert its superiority over others. Such textual figurations naturally reflect the socio-cultural milieu of the Persian colonisation of Yehud.<sup>17</sup>

The immigrant elites' collaboration with Persian authority imbues this literature with a colonial function that scripts a certain nuance to their relationship with the Moabites. It reflects a quasi-typological (in the normative sense) re-presentation of the relationship between these immigrants and their contemporary Moabite (and Ammonite and Amalekite) neighbors. The primary history of Genesis-2 Kings affirms a differentiation between the Lot/Abraham lineages. A forced (Abram's decision) and necessary separation (not simply over the issue of resource allocation but also over the attendant *control over* resource allocation; see the detailed analysis of Heard 2001, 30–38) between the two families concluded with Lot choosing the plains of Jordan east of the river and his uncle settling Canaan (Gen. 13.1-10). Regardless of reader perceptions of Lot and Abraham in Genesis, their differentiation in that particular cycle typologically makes a case for a clear separation of Yehudians from their neighbors (Heard 2001, 60–61). The descendants and land rights of these two ancestors do not, and should not, overlap. But such separation does not necessarily depend on the vilification of the Persian-period Moabites though the Judges' satire certainly doesn't hurt. Typecasting the neighbour(s) as 'other' enables their psychological defeat when physical defeat may not be possible. Colonial discourse affirms Abraham's descendants' (i.e. immigrant Yehudites) right to the land denied to Lot's descendants, but does so by suppressing their own immigrant status and experiences of displacement reenacted in their brutal displacement of the indigenous population. The stereotypical stupid, but certainly not alien or foreign, Moabites become the archetype for the ethnic group too incompetent to control the land and the antitype to the canny ingroup utilizing this story to establish its identity as superior. However, sociological observations subvert by revealing that: (1) such ethnic humour misdirects attention from the ingroup's own history as immigrants and social status as colonised; and that (2) ethnic slurs reflect a dissatisfaction of certain traits within one group projected onto another (Moabites) in order to disparage them. Therefore, 'Israel', its alter ego reflected in Moab, becomes the stupid group, too stupid to have political control of the land, especially when they know what it takes to maintain it but cannot or will not (?). So, who's calling whom 'stupid'?

### **COLONISATION, IMMIGRATION AND TEJAS**

Anglo colonisation of the Mexican province of Coahuila y Tejas began in earnest prior to Mexican independence from Spain (1821 with the Treaty of Cordova) and afterwards with the encouragement of the Mexican government. In addition to colonisation laws (Colonisation Law Decree of 1823; National Colonisation Law 1824; Colonisation Law State of Coahuila and Texas 1825) governing the newly-formed colonies, certain notable Anglo settlers (e.g. Moses Austin, his son Stephen, and Green De Witt),<sup>18</sup> eventually known as *empresarios* (an immigration agent), also agreed to abide by certain conditions of the land grant permission, namely allegiance to the Republic of Mexico and devotion to the Roman Catholic Church. Many Anglos immigrated to Tejas and for numerous reasons not least of which were cheap land and easy terms of payment,

better climate, dissatisfaction over the 'cession' of Tejas to New Spain with the Adams-Onís treaty (1819), and a fresh start for debtors, drifters and fugitives (Weber 1982, 166).

A repressed part of US national history occluded by red herrings like the fear of lost jobs and demographic trends in Southwest America,<sup>19</sup> Anglo colonisation of Tejas assumed a 'natural right' to the land with the Conquest-Settlement motif as religious justification. As early as the 1790s, Anglo settlers illegally immigrated into East Texas and had, by 1829, outnumbered the Mexicans. In 1828 General Manuel de Mier y Téran's diarist José María Sánchez y Tapia noted on their mission through Tejas (1828), 'the Americans from the north have taken possession of practically all of the eastern part of Tejas, in most cases without the permission of the authorities' with a population of '25 thousand savages, eight thousand North Americans with their slaves, and four to five thousand Mexicans' (quoted in Jackson 2000, 104, 29).<sup>20</sup> The ramifications of these illegal Anglo immigrants flooding across the Tejas borders posed grave concerns, namely land 'squatting', commented on by Téran: they 'settle where it suits them, and they take over whatever land they desire without the *alcalde's* approval and in defiance of the laws of colonisation and of the rights of prior ownership' (quoted in Jackson 2000, 104). Like the New England colonists, these immigrants, 'with their political constitution in their pockets' (quoted in Jackson 2000, 97-98, 178), assumed natural rights to the land, refused to integrate within Mexican culture, kept to their own religious and political beliefs, insisted on the right to own slaves, and clamored for Mexican recognition of their ideas about self-government.

The influx of Anglo immigrants (most illegal) settling amongst indigenous Mexicans naturally fueled some ethnic antipathy, which, ironically, was overtly strongest against the Mexicans. This ethnic antipathy, however, actually had its roots in early America with the colonial forebears' disdain of Catholic Spain simply transferred to their American heirs (Powell 1971, 118).<sup>21</sup> European colonists consumed the biblical motifs of their ethnocentric, sacred writ to transform its re-presentations into their own. 'From the earliest days of colonization', comments historian A. Raboteau (1994, 9), 'white Christians had represented their journey across the Atlantic to America as the exodus of a New Israel from the bondage of Egypt into the Promised Land of milk and honey' – i.e. as 'Israel'.<sup>22</sup> Immigrant Europeans claimed superiority justifying Indian genocide as the will of God and their 'natural' and 'civil right' to the land. Spanish colonists regarded the Indians as naturally rude, brutal, inferior and thus natural slaves,<sup>23</sup> and English colonists were no different viewing the Indians as 'fierce and barbarous/heathen folk, hellish fiends, and brutish men' (quoted in Cherry 1998, 42). And the Constitution (1787), which reified the sacred myth of America and a social structure with legal, economic and political mechanisms ensuring privileges for those at the centre denied to most on the margins (De la Torre 2005, 59; Council of Economic Advisors 1998), seared racist biases on the Euroamerican conscience for centuries to come by its depersonalization of nonwhites 'as three-fifths of a person' (Art. 1, Sec. 2.3).<sup>24</sup> The appropriation of the Conquest-Settlement ideology by the centrist culture of American society historically has only legitimated the oppression and depersonalization of those on the margins – e.g. the genocide of Native Americans, the slavery of Africans, and the pauperization of Latino/as.

The superior attitudes of the Anglo colonists certainly did not go unnoticed by Terán: 'It would cause you the same chagrin that it has caused me to see the opinion that is held of our nation by these foreign colonists, since... they know no other Mexicans than the inhabitants



about here...the most ignorant of negroes and Indians' (quoted in Weber 1973, 102). On the basis of a few Mexicans living in East Texas who comprised the 'abject class, the poorest and most ignorant', the colonists stereotyped *all* Mexicans as 'nothing more than blacks and Indians, all of them ignorant' (quoted in Jackson 2000, 97–98). Even Terán's own words seem to betray a class stereotype that may have helped perpetuate the colonisers' stereotypes of Mexicans. By and large, Anglo colonists viewed Mexicans as ignorant, lazy, thieving, sinister, cheating, cowardly half-breeds. S. Austin, the most known of all Tejas colonists, remarked, 'My object, the sole and only desire of my ambitions since I first saw Texas, was to... settle it with an intelligent honorable and enterprising [*sic*] people' (Barker 1924–28, 2.414, 427, 678). Stereotyping another ethnic group reflects the shortcomings perceived within that ethnic group projecting their unacceptable inner strivings. The ethnic group stereotyped therefore becomes the alter ego ('them') to 'us'. The Americanization of the Mexican North even increased antipathy between Mexicans on the frontier – the *californios*, *nuevomexicanos* and *tejanos* –and those of the interior. The Anglo population spike in Tejas from about 2500 in 1821 to over 40,000 in 1836 only intensified colonists' perceptions of superiority with stereotypes of Mexicans as stupid and lazy being perpetuated and finally hardened by war in 1846 (Weber 1982, 177; Weber 1973, 52).

The illegal immigration of arrogant, aggressive Anglos across Tejas' borders signaled US territorial expansion westward looming on the horizon. Secretary of State L. Alamán realised the threat: 'Where others send invading armies... [the North Americans] send their colonists' (quoted in Weber 1982, 158). That a nation existed in the Spanish borderlands of Tejas mattered little to the Jeffersonian administration (i.e. Presidents Jefferson, Madison and Monroe). Proponents of 'Manifest Destiny', a nineteenth century code phrase for racial supremacy with biblical underpinnings that disseminated the ethno-colonialist sentiments expressed within the Monroe Doctrine among the parlance of mainstream US, regarded Latin Americans as inferior. American filibusters (armed intrusions by US adventurers into countries of peace) were practical ways for Anglos to exploit their perceptions of superiority over Mexicans. In 1805, President Jefferson's designs on Tejas grew transparent as he secured congressional appropriation of US\$5000 for the 'grand excursion' to the Southwest known as the Red River expedition, second only to that of Lewis and Clark (Flores 2006). The Jeffersonian administration actively supported covert operations and filibustering expeditions that increased illegal Anglo immigration in Tejas,<sup>25</sup> encouraged colonists' disaffection with Spanish rule, promoted territorial expansion, and perpetuated racial biases via Manifest Destiny.

## **COLONISATION, IMMIGRATION AND MODERN SOUTHWEST AMERICA**

By the second half of the nineteenth century, 13 Anglos had amassed 1.3 million acres in 'legal' sales from 358 Mexican landowners (Gonzalez 2000, 99–101) and violence against Mexicans was commonplace with whole communities being uprooted in the towns of Austin, Seguin, and Uvalde. Though Mexicans comprised more than 90 per cent of the population in the Rio Grande Valley by the 1920s, the white minority controlled the land and all political power. The combination of mineral (gold and silver – California and Nevada; copper – Arizona) and animal wealth (cattle – Texas; sheep – New Mexico, Colorado and parts of California) on annexed Mexican lands with Mexican laborers recruited to extract it vastly expanded the electrical, cattle, sheep, mining, and railroad industries thus expanding Western prosperity in the twentieth century.

Yet, racist attitudes of superiority still run deep within the Euroamerican conscience as the stereotype of Mexicans as stupid perpetuates in Anglo America. Sentiments like ‘go back home where you came from’ belie an ignorance of the fact that they have done just that. Before there was a US, Mexicans lived ‘here’, hence the establishment of their double consciousness – native-born and immigrant.<sup>26</sup> Two centuries later, the after-effects of colonialism resound in the insecurity among many over the current immigration debate wherein racist attitudes of superiority continue to find expression in local (note the anti-immigration ordinances of Hazelton, Pennsylvania [2006] and recently of Farmers Branch, Texas [2007]) and national politics targeting Latin American immigrants.

The American myth’s conscious adoption of ethnocentric biblical motifs and typologically justifying its conquest-settlement of the ‘promised land’ by ‘Israel’ (un)consciously contributed to dehumanizing stereotypes that entrenched racial prejudice. Moreover, America’s national narrative consciously repressed the dislocation of communities (both those of the indigenous population of North America and of the European immigrants) and ‘forgot’ its own diverse immigrant roots and experiences of exile and displacement in its imagi/nation as a homogeneous community in an effort to fix US identity.<sup>27</sup> Much to the chagrin of proponents of the national narrative, the reality of other identities, like race, resists displacement. The innate superiority of the coloniser reinforced by stereotypes betrays its anxiety as the colonised reflects back the gaze of the coloniser depicted in the figure below.



**Figure 1**  
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Conversations among an informed public remembering the suppressed ‘other’ by the American myth gradually evanesce the conscious amnesia of Euroamerican origins with hope for the larger public discourse and its immigration angst, which may simply reflect nothing more than ‘a fear of the depravity that lives in our own hearts’ (Jensen 2006, 54), in other words, within ‘us’.

## CONCLUSION

Puns, stock characterisations, feminising strategies and scatology collectively satirise the Moabites in Judges 3.12-30 as the stupid ethnotype. Part of the Exodus-Conquest-Settlement ideology, this story's cultural ethno-typing humour gets co-opted as colonial discourse that justifies claims of divine right to land and political authority over it, that sanctions attitudes of superiority, and that legitimates depersonalisation in a context of identity construction while suppressing immigrant status via indigenisation.

Sociologically, the consumption of such literature within the colonial nexus of Yehud and Tejas by immigrants enables their projections and reinforces group identity amidst conflict. They 'Moabitise' their neighbors by typecasting them as the incompetent 'other', which, at a more abstract level, is a reflection of 'self'. Whether Amalekite, Moabite, Ammonite, or Mexican matters not to 'Israel' for anyone else is just an(other) typ(ological) 'Canaanite' and, therefore, through a literary act of guilt by association, demonised as 'other'. Postcolonial observations, however, redirect the textual misdirection of this ethnic humour to reveal these immigrants' double consciousness: the land is theirs, yet it is not theirs; they are indigenous, yet they are also immigrants; they are colonisers, yet they are also colonised; they are the ingroup, yet they are also the outgroup; and they are 'self', yet they are also 'other'.

Uncritical interpretations of this literature re-present the experiences of 'Israel' (whether in the contexts of Yehud, early America, or Tejas) conquering and settling land confiscated from the natives with no concern to its *nachleben*, which, over time, has justified one ethnicity's power and privilege over another by fomenting racist attitudes. But when the centre co-opts sacred writ rife with ethnic slurs, interpretation must concern itself with the socio-political effects of that which defines the power and privilege of those at the centre as a blessing from God on the basis of their 'moral righteousness' and 'innate superiority'. Otherwise, prosperity theology and capitalism (especially within an American context) collude to dis-member (a nation) by uncritically branding a disenfranchised ethnic group with a 'stupid' stereotype. To engage such concerns obfuscated by colonialist ideology critically re-members by revealing 'us' to be more like 'them' as well as – more than we care to admit – 'other' and 'stupid'.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This fictionalised account is based on a loose adaptation of numerous historical sources (Weber 1973, 80–82, 84, 101, 104, 108; Weber 1988a, 105–115; Weber 1988b, 153–167).
- <sup>2</sup> In the polarised immigration debate, opponents contend that the 'illegals' are drug-smuggling criminals who don't speak English, take jobs from US citizens, and drive down property values, while proponents point out that 'illegals' pay billions of dollars in sales and income taxes and to 'false' social security accounts, and do hard, dirty, dangerous jobs that most Americans do not want to do and at very low wages with minimal protections and benefits (Hernandez 2006, 170–171). This polarisation, exacerbated by radical, right wing politics, further incites xenophobic notions revealing the intrinsic, racial biases within the US, which, in July 1954, unleashed 'Operation Wetback' (Gonzalez 2000, 203).
- <sup>3</sup> Racist stereotypes and jokes, forms of mimicry, express 'the contradictory articulations of reality and desire' (Bhabha 1994, 130) by disavowing reality and replacing it with 'a recognizable Other, 'as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite' (122).

4 Colonial discourse encourages assimilation of the coloniser's culture by the colonised. But this mimicry  
'spooks' the coloniser who 'fantasizes endless monstrous stereotypes that can only lead to anxiety  
rather than the desired certainty' – namely, the fixed identity of the colonised (Huddart 2006, 61).

5 Davies (1995, 92, 116–117) contends that Jewish elites generated their own identity utilising the  
name 'Israel', though understood in a religious sense contra its general historical understanding, via  
'the production of a history' legitimating their indigenization despite being an alien culture.

6 The construction of the 'other' always precedes that of 'self' since the latter only acquires its meaning  
in relation to what is not 'self'. Otherness does not exist apart from 'self'; rather, 'other' exists within  
'self' and reflects back the anxiety of 'self'.

7 Any positive relations between the Israelites and the Moabites are limited to David leaving his parents  
with the king of Moab for safekeeping (1 Sam. 22.3-4) and the book of Ruth though with no consensus  
on the latter. While arguing the Moabites as the negative stereotype in the Hebrew Bible, Levenson  
(1985, 251) regards the presentation of Ruth, 'a paragon of good faith', as providing a new perspective  
on the group. In contrast, Fewell and Gunn (1988, 103, 105–106) contend that the ethnicity of Ruth  
becomes central to the story. Naomi is able to maneuver Ruth into situations fraught with danger  
for the Moabite while leaving herself relatively safe.

8 Throughout the history of the Jewish people, Amalek has always been regarded as the apogee of evil.  
Not only has Amalek functioned as the primary 'other', they have also become the archetype applied  
by rabbis and laymen alike projected onto other nations or groups (e.g. Adolf Hitler and Yassir  
Arafat) as a perceived threat to the existence of the Jewish people. In all cases, the objective remains  
the same – 'to stigmatize existing foes by comparing them to the archenemy of the Jewish people'  
(Cromer 2001, 191–202).

9 The descriptor 'ingroup' (family, village, nation, or any kind of group, most notably an ethnic group)  
indicates the spatial demarcation between those 'inside' from those 'outside' with flexible boundaries  
that may enlarge or shrink relative to the location of the 'other' (Befu 1999, 22).

10 M. Apte (1985, 145) offers detailed comments on the problematic of functional theories. For further  
consideration of psychological perspectives on humour, see Goldstein and McGhee (1972) and  
Roedelein (2002).

11 Davies provides a descriptive categorization of relationships between the canny and stupid regarding  
the language and ethnic jokes about stupidity (see the tables in Davies 1987, 40–41 and Davies 1990,  
42). Cultural dominance by the ingroup at the center establishes the group that is the local butt of  
jokes about stupidity as deviations from the cultural pattern.

12 In fairness to Martineau's research, his conclusions concern that type of humour in a relationship  
where humour for the oppressed 'becomes a compensatory device making the fear and tragedy of the  
moment seem only temporary' (Martineau 1972, 104).

13 Cross-cultural analyses reveal that the process of demonising humans preys on ethnocentrism whereby  
to transfer any moral weaknesses, to ascribe evil and immoral attributes, to reduce to subhuman or  
nonhuman status, and to punish or destroy the victim with moral justification (Befu 1999, 26).

14 Such an assertion cuts against the grain of traditional scholarship which places the production of the  
book of Judges as part of the Deuteronomistic History generally no later than the Babylonian exile  
with Jehoiachin's imprisonment. But, lest we forget, that is just theory with no incontrovertible basis  
precluding a view of this history's production some twenty years later. A growing, vocal percentage  
within biblical studies have moved from the traditional position to proffer a later era such as the  
Persian (and myself included) or, for some, the Hellenistic. More significant for my purposes, however,  
is an exploration of textual consumption.

15 Davies connects the Nehemiah material to events in the late fourth century on the basis of Josephus'  
mention of a marriage between the family of a Jewish high priest and a Samaritan Sanballat (III) at

issue (*Ant.* 11.7.2-8.6 §§302-345). And he regards Ezra, unmentioned in sources even as late as the second century, as a reflection of scribal interests in that era (Davies 1998, 100–102; cf. Garbini 1988, 151–169).

16 On the issue of intermarriage within the Persian community of Yehud, see the view of Smith-Christopher (1994, 260–264) whose argument that the intermarriages reflect a disadvantaged group's effort to rise in social status to survive as a group stands in tension with the required breakup of foreign marriages by Ezra-Nehemiah. By contrast, Høglund (1992, 27, 226, 238–239, 244) regards the prohibitions of Ezra-Nehemiah as reflective of motives consistent with their roles as imperial officials. Their opposition to intermarriages connects with imperial strategies of displacing populations and defining them in ethnic terms for land management.

17 An intriguing prospect, though well beyond the purview of this study, brought to my attention for consideration is the relationship of textual consumption and eventual canonisation. It may very well be that the continual functionality of this history because of its ideological work contributed to its canonization within the Jewish tradition.

18 On December 23, 1820 Moses Austin petitioned the Mexican government for land settlement in Mexican territory and received his *empresario* contract from Governor Don Antonio Martínez on February 8, 1821 to colonise Mexican territory but died prior to doing so (see Barker 1924–28, 370; Martínez 1821).

19 If current demographic trends persist, Euroamericans will cease to be the majority by 2050 (De la Torre 2005, 8). Recent estimates by the US Census Bureau (2004; 2005) reveal Texas, Hawaii, New Mexico, the District of Columbia and California as 'majority-minority' states where the non-white population has exceeded 50 per cent of the states' total population. Of course, these population projections do not take into consideration an estimated total of 11.5–12 million undocumented Mexicans comprising only three to four percent of the national population as of March 2006 (Passel 2006).

20 The illegal Anglo immigration into East Texas especially contributed to the population spike in Nacogdoches. James Dill (1822), *alcalde* (an official with some executive, legislative and judicial powers to hold court) and commandant of Nacogdoches, informed Governor Martínez of 'a number of people... settling between this place and the river Sabean on the Ilish bayou... without any kind of leave or permission'.

21 This anti-Spanish view by New England colonists surfaces in a seventeenth century missionary tract by Cotton Mather for Spaniards in the New World 'to open their eyes and be converted... away from Satan to God' (quoted in Weber 1973, 59). The anti-Spanish views of the English colonists (e.g. Spaniards as cruel, greedy and lazy) prompted the Spanish historians' pejorative label 'The Black Legend', which, over time, ingrained antipathy of Mexicans and fueled attitudes of American superiority. Color, which symbolised the essence of good and evil, became a basic determinant in Anglo associations of Mexicans with Indians and Africans and connotations of both as dirty (De León 1983, 14–23).

22 The typological identification of the colonists as 'God's American Israel' (quoted in Cherry 1998, 83) and the indigenous natives as Canaanites persisted into the nineteenth century as attested by T. Williams' (1822) letter in response to President Lincoln's pardon of Sioux Indians. Williams (1822) compared the Sioux to 'heathen Amelkites' and 'savage Canaanites'.

23 Bartolomé de Las Casas defended the Indians against Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in the great theological debate at Valladolid (1550–51). Sepúlveda championed the Aristotelian doctrine of natural slavery arguing that the Indians' nature justified war (and forcible Christianisation) against them as both expedient and lawful contra Las Casas who contended for the conversion of the Indians by peaceful

means whereby they would be loyal subjects to Spain. Las Casas's objections, however, were not to colonisation but to the brutal treatment of the Indians (Hanke 1959).

24 E.g. George Washington (1783) compared the Indians to wolves and 'wild beasts' and Thomas Jefferson (1807) regarded them as 'merciless Savages'. And even after the genocide was winding down, President Theodore Roosevelt (1901) stopped short of claiming that the only good Indians were dead ones though he believed nine out of ten were and didn't want to inquire too closely into the tenth (Jensen 2006, 30–32).

25 Note the Hidalgo Revolution (1810) in Mexico and the Gutiérrez-Magee expedition (1812–13), an insurrectionist movement comprising American and Mexican recruits that received unofficial financial and military assistance from the US State Department under President Madison (Owsley 1997, 42–59).

26 Circulated stereotypes through various re-presentations (e.g. racist jokes) about the stupidity of a particular ethnic group by the dominant culture often results in a form of double consciousness, a concept described in the experience of African Americans by W. E. B. DuBois (1996, 7). The anxiety underlying the stereotype, however, occasions the opportunity for resistance by the colonised. Rejecting how the dominant culture sees and defines people of color becomes in itself a consciousness-raising activity allowing the marginalised to define themselves apart from the negative stereotypes imposed upon them. Unfortunately, many Latino/as define themselves through the eyes of the dominant culture regarding 'whiteness' as a reflection of success and inclusion (Pew Hispanic Center 2004).

27 The initial debates between Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson over immigration reveal the un/conscious amnesia within America. Jefferson's image of hospitableness between Native Americans and Pilgrims reflected a conscious silence of the brutality of early Europeans and doubly served his pro-immigration policy and annexation of new territories. Conversely, Hamilton's own anti-immigration stance reflected an unconscious repression of the nation's immigrants roots, especially the denial of his own 'foreignness' as an exile (Behdad 2000, 143–147).

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