

November 2019

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Recommended Citation

Ballentine, Debra (2019) "Foreignization in Ancient Competition," *Journal of Religious Competition in Antiquity*. Vol. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://soar.stonehill.edu/jrca/vol1/iss1/2>

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Foreignization in Ancient Competition

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Introduction: Categories and Competition

The label “foreign” is one rhetorical tool that ancient West Asian and ancient Mediterranean authors utilized to bolster their positions vis-à-vis the various social, political, ritual, and/or theological matters at hand. In what follows, I term strategic use of the label “foreign” in primary texts “foreignization,” a specific subtype of *Othering*. Critical analysis of the labels and categories “foreign” and “other” contributes to our parsing of religious competition in the ancient world, and such analysis is a requisite task for critical reconstructions of ancient society and cultus. Within biblical scholarship, specifically the reconstruction of ancient Israelite and Judean society and religions, notions of “foreign,” Canaanite, and “other gods” have been recognized as rhetorical terms that are utilized by certain biblical authors to negatively portray what those authors consider illegitimate. Such foreignization is polemical in nature. As discussed through the examples below, attention to biblical foreignization allows us to appreciate the dynamic creativity with which ancient authors construct notions of *Self* and *Other* as well as the nuances in their formulations of prescriptive behaviors. After discussing primary and secondary categorizations more broadly, this article focuses on biblical vocabulary associated with “foreign” and “other gods” in order to demonstrate how such constructions are operative within competitive discourses about a variety of contingent claims that are central to biblical cultus and the status of the Israelite and Judean people and the land.

Before delving into biblical notions of “foreign” specifically, I would like to broadly contextualize my discussion of categories and how we utilize, critique, and revise them as scholars. Across the Humanities, we study human cultural products, and in the field of religious studies, we focus on human cultural products that pertain to entities, places, and things that are presented as transcendent, divine, sacred, holy, otherworldly, or universal. Such notions involve claims about human behavior, values, and ideas that are culturally contingent yet framed as natural, given, or even “god-given.” The categories with which we organize phenomena communicate how we value them: when we categorize, we impose hierarchies. One essential task of critical scholarship is to continually and rigorously re-evaluate the categories we employ, with the goal of understanding how they have developed, what hegemonic or non-dominant power structures are associated with them, and how we might redescribe the associated phenomena.

Within biblical studies, the majority of our data is ancient: ancient texts along with archeological evidence. Throughout the development of scholarly biblical studies, we have both used the biblical anthology as a source for reconstructing history and interpreted the biblical corpus as literature. Ancient literature generally represents the views of select elite minority groups, who employ contingent categories and interested lenses to depict some socio-historical realia. For example, court scribes associated with a particular dynasty might portray their king enjoying the endorsement of a patron deity, while rivals purportedly suffer for lack of divine favor. I am most interested in contingent categories about which interpreters, at some point, have mistaken our ancient depictions of socio-historical realia for accurate, objective descriptions. For example, labels such as “foreign” or “impure” are sometimes mistaken as accurate descriptions of people or practices that an ancient author wishes to depict negatively. Simply put, these are ideological depictions rather than objective descriptions.¹ Sometimes interpreters of the biblical text then use these same non-objective labels as if they have explanatory value when accounting for differences among ancient social groupings or cultic activities. Such an approach risks reproducing the ideologies, interested stances, and privileged hierarchies that our objects of study promote. Moreover, in our explanations of ancient data, we ought to avoid anachronistic and ill-fitting concepts, such as invoking the concept of “cosmic evil” when “alternative divine hierarchy” would better fit the perceptual milieu or invoking “monotheism”² when more accurate notions might be “exclusive covenant loyalty” or “claims of divine incomparability” or “competing iconic politics.” Such muddling methodology prevents us from fully appreciating the rhetorical work being performed within the particular narrative and thereby hinders our reconstructions of ancient history and cult.³

1 My understanding of “ideology” is well represented by the following: Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (New York: Verso, 1991); Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford, 1985); Émile Durkheim, *Les règles de la méthode sociologique* (Paris: University of France, 1907); Gary Lease, “Ideology,” in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (New York: Continuum, 2000), 438–47.

2 The imprecision of “monotheism” as a category is exhibited in caveat terms such as “monopolytheism” applied to some biblical conceptions; “virtual monotheism” for some Babylonian and Assyrian traditions; and descriptions of “relapses into a form of polytheism” even after “an explicit monotheism” has purportedly developed (*Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnson [Cambridge: Belknap, 2004], 392, 397). It is a great credit to scholars who challenge the boundaries of the categories “monotheism” and “polytheism” as a dichotomy, and clearly their aim is to foster comparative study. In speaking of “relapses,” I do not think this is meant in a qualitative sense as it is clearly meant in a quantitative sense within critical scholarship. Yet, I think that we can further improve our comparative study by utilizing less problematic categories and descriptors altogether. Many scholars have articulated more nuanced categories by shifting the discussion to “monolatry”; for example, Juha Pakkila distinguishes between “tolerant” and “intolerant” “monolatry,” in *Intolerant Monolatry in the Deuteronomistic History* (Helsinki: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999). Of course, “monolatry” and “henotheism” as categories require careful parsing as well.

3 While I focus on the use and mis-use categories such as “foreign” and “other” in this essay, I note that there are many categories that biblical scholars have utilized, critiqued, and revised. For

The use of categories and their implicit hierarchies is an effective rhetorical tool in the realm of competition, whether social, political, theological, or a mixture thereof. As interested actors or authors engage in debate, they exhibit shared discourse, vocabulary, concerns, and claims. Yet, they tend to distinguish themselves sharply from their closest interlocutors. This is certainly the case with the category “foreign” and similar categories, both in contemporary and ancient data. In discussion of Israelite and Judean religions, the rejection of certain ideas and practices within particular biblical texts is sometimes explained as resulting from the “foreignness” of the rejected phenomenon. When analyzing the category “foreign” we have both modern and ancient sources for confusion; namely, we have ancient authors constructing the category “foreign” as well as modern interpreters aiming to explain what the ancient authors might have meant by “foreign.” Within our ancient biblical data, when authors label or categorize practices such as ritual killing of humans⁴ and goddess veneration⁵ as “foreign,”

example, Carol Meyers has made influential distinctions in her works regarding reconstruction of the lives and behaviors of “Israelite women” as distinct from the literary portrayals of “biblical women” (Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* [Oxford: Oxford, 1991], 4). As with my discussion of “foreign” and “other,” so with her focus on ancient women, the issue of representation (in her case, of women) by authors of biblical texts is crucial (*Discovering Eve*, 12). She argues that scholarly use of problematic categories (“magic” versus “religion,” for example) has disproportionately hindered rigorous consideration of the roles of women by biblical scholars (*Households and Holiness: The Religious Culture of Israelite Women* [Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2005], 20–21).

4 Ritual killing of humans, specifically one’s sons or daughters, is included among various outlawed practices that are associated with the “abominations of the nations” that have been driven out of the land (Deut 18:9-12); Manasseh’s various cultic activities, including ritual killing of sons, are said to be worse than the Amorite’s and nations’ activities (2 Kgs 21 and 2 Chron 33); and 2 Kgs 16:3 labels Ahaz’s ritual killing of his son as *gōy* practice and abomination. However, in the case of Jephthah, human ritual killing of his daughter is portrayed as valid and effective (Judges 11), specifically his oath to the deity includes a ritual killing and this oath is effective in eliciting the deity’s positive response in helping Jephthah in battle. This example, as well as that of Mesha (2 Kgs 3:26-27) and Abraham (Gen 22) offer a tension with the aforementioned injunctions and negative portrayals of human ritual killing. Moreover, we have passages that imply ritual killing of humans to Yahweh (Ezek 16:20-21; 23:37; Jer 7:30-34; Isa 57:5; contrast Jer 19:5-6). For discussion of the biblical, comparative, and archeological data, see Francesca Stavrakapoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004). For discussion of the afterlives of the notion, see Jon Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale, 1993).

5 Association of goddess veneration with the foreign occurs in several passages, for example, Judges 2:12-13 associates honoring Baal and Ashteroth with honoring neighboring peoples’ gods, as does Judges 10:6; 1 Sam 7:3 associates Ashteroth with “strange gods” and implies that exclusive service of Yahweh includes doing away with Ashteroth and “strange gods”; 1 Kgs 11:5, 33; 2 Kgs 23:13 identify Ashteroth as a Sidonian deity whom Solomon honored; and Jer 7:18 places making cakes for the Queen of Heaven in parallel with pouring libations to “other gods.” However, we also see a tension between these negative associations and the observation that the placement of a cultic object associated with Asherah in Yahweh’s temple (2 Kgs 21:7; 23:6) suggests that whoever put it there understood this ritual activity as complementary to honoring Yahweh. Of course, this set of examples includes issues of the “foreign” as well as issues of the gender-construct of the deities in question. I posit that honoring the wife and queen of the divine patron or suzerain does not constitute abrogation of exclusive covenant

this is a rhetorical move whereby authors negatively categorize practices they reject. Nonetheless, some texts imply Israelites and Judeans doing these same “foreign” practices for Yahweh, in Jerusalem, at the temple, as genuinely Israelite or Judean things to do. That is, while the primary text warns against or forbids Israelites and Judeans from doing these things, and negatively portrays the practices as improper, when we “read against the grain” of such passages, the descriptions sometimes betray that Judeans were doing these things.⁶ Moreover, we can entertain the plausibility that the social and cultic preferences of the authors, who appear to represent hegemonic positions in the world of the narrative and from that vantage forbid “improper” practices, might not have been the historically normative social or cultic behaviors.⁷ Some practices forbidden in the texts were likely regarded as proper honoring of Yahweh by the Judeans engaging in them.⁸

While modern critical scholarship has recognized this tension within the primary sources, some interpreters tend to reproduce the vested stances of the ancient authors, taking polemical portrayals at face value, overlooking the rhetorical work biblical authors accomplish with the categories “foreign,” Canaanite, and “other gods.” I propose to term strategic use of the label “foreign” in primary texts: foreignization. We may then critique scholarly misunderstanding of foreignization as well as misguided use of the category, concept, or label

loyalty, just as bringing a gift to the wife and queen of one’s human suzerain would be respectful, not rebellious. For discussion of literary and material data on Asherah as well as her relationship with Yahweh and the relevant constructions of divine gender, see Michael Coogan, “Fire in the Divine Loins: God’s Wives in Myth and Metaphor,” *God and Sex: What the Bible Really Says* (New York, Hachette, 2011), 166–88; Bob Becking, Meindert Dijkstra, Marjo C. A. Korpel, and Karel J. H. Vriezen, eds., *Only One God?: Monotheism in Ancient Israel and the Veneration of the Goddess Asherah* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Barton, John and Francesca Stavrakopoulou, eds., *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah* (London: T & T Clark, 2010); William Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?: Archeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); Saul Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel*, SBLMS 34 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988); Raphael Patai, “The Goddess Asherah,” *JNES* 24 1/2 (1965): 37–52; Theodore J. Lewis, Review of Susan Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah*, *JBL* 113.4 (1994): 705–708.

6 Patrick Miller has been influential within biblical scholarship, uncovering and highlighting the polemical nature of particular biblical texts and the embedded tensions between portrayals of phenomena and biblical commentary about those phenomena, such as “other gods.” See, for example, his comments in Miller, *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays*, JSOTSup (Sheffield: Sheffield, 2000) 267, 436, 595, 600; *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2000), 58, 213 n.5. As I discuss, while such methods of reading and interpretation are now standard in critical biblical studies, there remains a need to communicate to scholars in related disciplines how such insights have affected updated scholarly reconstructions of ancient Israelite, Judean, and “biblical” “religions,” especially as they relate to similarities and distinctions between ancient Israelites and Judean and their neighbors.

7 Examples of this would include archeological and biblical data that does not abide by Deuteronomistic preferences for centralization of cultus in Jerusalem, and likewise, the Persian period “Passover Letter” from Elephantine and the Hellenistic period community documents among the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran.

8 For data and discussion that supports my assertion on this point, see notes 4 and 5.

“foreign” when explaining difference as “mis-foreignization,” that is, using ancient rhetorical depictions as objective second-order categories. There are several benefits to recognizing foreignization as a rhetorical practice. First, attentiveness to this rhetorical strategy enriches our appreciation of the creativity of ancient authors, that is, to better see how they bolster their interested stances. Second, because foreignization was (and still is) a strategy utilized among a wide variety of literary producers, we can identify shared discourses across social groupings. That is, while authors might be claiming radical differences between their respective *Us* versus *Them*, they might each do so through shared discourse about what is “foreign” or “impure” or “barbaric,” and so on. Third, analysis of how authors use such categories is central for distinguishing between the strategic portrayals versus the realia of ancient competing perspectives.

In order to examine foreignization as a rhetorical strategy employed within primary texts, we first need to overview how relevant terms are used across our corpora of choice, as I do below for Hebrew biblical examples. Scholars interested in Greco-Roman, Late Antique, or even Medieval texts would analyze terms such as barbarian/barbaric, pagan, *joudaioi/joudaiζō*, heretic/heretical, and so on. In contemporary American social discourse, we would need to analyze use of terms like terrorist, jihad, Muslim, Islamic, “alien,” immigrant, and thug. We can identify and productively study strategic use of such terms within primary texts. Moreover, we may critique misunderstanding and misuse of these first-order, and potentially derogatory, concepts as having second-order explanatory value, which ought to be neutrally critical and objective. To be clear, though I focus on Hebrew Bible examples of this rhetorical strategy that I describe as foreignization, I emphasize that there are analogous examples of this rhetorical strategy in subsequent periods, some of which are genetically related to or based upon biblical models. Likewise, we have “mis-foreignization” or faulty explanations regarding phenomena of subsequent time periods, and the need for scrutiny of ignorant or willful misuse of categories has become quite dire in our contemporary socio-political context.

The term foreignization hitherto has not been utilized within biblical studies, and my use of the term in this particular theoretical way is my own innovation, as is my development of the label and methodological critique of “mis-foreignization.” After developing my application of the term when analyzing this rhetorical device as it recurs within ancient Mediterranean literatures, I found two noteworthy prior uses outside of biblical studies. Lawrence Venuti, a scholar of modern literature and translation theory, uses the terms “foreignization” and “domestication” to differentiate between two strategies of translation. “Domestication” fits the translation to the target culture, making the original seem more familiar to the secondary audience. Whereas translations exhibiting “foreignization” maintain unfamiliar notions present within the original. Venuti prefers “foreignization” because he

considers “domestication” to erase the original culture by conforming the text to the norms of the target audience.⁹ More recently, Martin Parlett uses the term “foreignization” in *Demonizing the President: The “Foreignization” of Barack Obama*. He discusses the “politics of identity” and constructions of the *Other*, making the important point that:

There is nothing structurally malignant in the process of othering; rather, it is the method by which we are able to constitute our own selves through the knowing of difference. It is how we form national identification in an international identity space, and how we affiliate with certain sports teams and engage in playful rivalries with others in the league. However, in practice, and in its association with a Eurocentric imperialist philosophy, to “other” is to positively position the self in distinction to a negative or an unequal Other, whereby segregation, negative stereotyping, and actions of non-admittance strengthen the identity of the person, group, or society in question to the detriment of another.¹⁰

Our employments of this term within cultural and literary analyses are complementary. Scholars of ancient studies will recognize that foreignization and “mis-foreignization” are methodological problems across fields of ancient West Asian and ancient Mediterranean studies. Parlett’s use facilitates our recognition that modern authors continue to use rhetorical strategies that play upon constructs of group self-identification, presumably because such strategies effectively persuade audiences. In our ancient literature, including the biblical anthology, when authors engage in *Othering* and foreignization, we typically have less data to counter or correct the negative characterizations than we might with modern examples, such as Parlett’s.

As scholars interested in competition, a central concern is how competing agents persuade their audiences. With ancient data, the preserved representations of the ancient world are partly determined by which competing voice or hand won out, so what “made the cut,” in terms of actual inscriptions, art, or literature depended on the success of strategies such as foreignization. The complementary nature of my discussion of foreignization with that of Parlett, for example, as well as with more general discussion of rhetorical use of the category “foreign,” shows that this topic is clearly not only a biblical studies or religious studies topic. As with my comments above about the study of human cultural products across the Humanities and how we, as scholars, use and refine second-order categories, the following discussion of particulars within the biblical anthology shares the broader scholarly perspectives of critical cultural studies, ideological criticism, and sociological approaches to literature.

⁹ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 2008).

¹⁰ Martin Parlett, *Demonizing the President: The “Foreignization” of Barack Obama* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014), 15–16.

Especially, as I revisit in the conclusion, questions regarding: who is represented? who is representing whom? to whose detriment? and, to whose benefit?

Foreignization in Hebrew Bible Texts

To firmly ground analysis of foreignization in the specific vocabulary of our primary Hebrew biblical texts, we must begin by examining the similarities and differences within our constellation of terms associated with the categories: “foreign”; Canaanite; and “other gods.” I address the terms: *‘am*, *nēkār*, *nokrîy*, and *gērîm*; *kəna’an* and *kəna’anîy*; the verbal roots *nkb* and *ḥrm*; *šqqūš*, *tāmē’*, *tō‘ēbāh*; *gōyîm*; and finally, *‘elohîm ‘ahērîm*, *‘elohē-nēkār*, and *‘el zār* or *zārîm*, and I emphasize the overlaps and distinctions among discourses surrounding these terms. In addition to collecting the relevant lexical data, this analysis models how to use foreignization as an analytical category and demonstrates the utility of doing so. I identify how use of these terms ranges from neutral to derogatory.¹¹ Throughout, the examples exhibit that these terms

11 Of course, many of the passages and terms I discuss with regard to the “foreign” are also relevant to discussion of how biblical traditions have been utilized to bolster modern claims regarding sexuality, gender, and “ethnic” stereotyping, as well as feminist, queer, and post-colonial scholarly critiques thereof. My discussion does not directly address each of these discourses and the many modern interpretations of particular biblical verses within them. Nonetheless, as I elaborate in the conclusion, my arguments about the use and mis-use of categories by interpreters and sometimes scholars as well as my demonstration of the importance of attention to lexical terms and their ranges of meaning within the original literary data are certainly complementary to and in line with scholarly aims to correct and undercut interpretations and translations that post-biblical authors and modern agents have generated in support of oppressing and dehumanizing any disenfranchised groups and persons. In addition to the bibliography below regarding association of Canaanites with “abomination” in particular, see Alice Bach, ed., *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Athalia Brenner-Idan and Carole Fontaine, eds., *Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods, and Strategies* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1997); Bernard Levinson, Victor Matthews, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, eds., *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (New York: T&T Clark, 1998); Tracy Lemos, *Violence and Personhood in Ancient Israel and Comparative Contexts* (New York: Oxford, 2017); Susan Ackerman, “Women in the Ancient Near East,” in *Near Eastern Archeology, A Reader*, ed. Suzanne Richard (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 150–56; Elisabeth Meier Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Society*, Volume 1: The Ancient Near East (New York: Continuum, 2004); Martha Roth, “Women and Law,” in *Women in the Ancient Near East: A Sourcebook*, ed. Mark Chavalas (New York: Routledge, 2013), 144–74; Saul M. Olyan, *Social Inequality in the World of the Text: The Significance of Ritual and Social Distinctions in the Hebrew Bible* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011); Olyan, “Stigmatizing Associations: The Alien, Things Alien, and Practices Associated with Aliens in Biblical Classification Schemas,” in *The Foreigner and the Law: Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. R. Achenbach, R. Albertz and J. Wöhrle (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 17–28; Erin Runions, “From Disgust to Humor: Rahab’s Queer Affect,” in *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Teresa J. Hornsbury and Ken Stone (Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 45–74.

were operative within competitive discourses about a variety of contingent claims that are central to biblical cultus and the status of the Israelite and Judean people and the land.

Usually rendered “strange” or “foreign,” typically, “strangers” or “foreign” people, “strange” lands, and “strange gods,” the Hebrew terms *nēkār* and *nokrîy* occur about 80 times total. At about 1850 occurrences, the more neutral and far more common word *‘am* “people” is often used as “my people” or “the people” for the Israelites and/or Judeans, and it can be used for other peoples as well, including the fifty plus references to the *‘am hā’āreṣ* “people of the land,” with varying referents (Gen 23:7, for example).¹² *nēkār* is never used for the Israelites or Judeans. When they are “strangers” in other people’s lands, they are *gērîm*, “sojourners,” “temporary inhabitants,” not “strangers” *bānē nēkār*. Exod 18:3 is a nice example, often quoted: “I have been a stranger in a strange land,” but actually better translated as, “I have been a migrant (*gēr*) in a strange land (*‘ereṣ nokrîyah*).” So *nēkār* is a very *Not-Us* term. We can see its rhetorical value clearly in Deut 31:16, in which the deity speaks to Moses about what will happen after the people enter the land and makes reference to the “gods of the *nēkār* of the land” (*‘elobē nēkār hā’āreṣ*). That is, the “strangers” of the land are the original inhabitants, the people already in the land before Joshua and company enter it and dispossess them. The biblical meta-narrative exhibits a construction of competing groups. The portrayal given by biblical authors implies competing ancient perspectives on who was “foreign” to whom and to where. Likewise, our archeological data for early Israel highlights how the literary portrayals represent highly interested stances. This is especially the case with regard to the relationships of the early Israelites to the land and to the population therein. The archeological data indicates continuity of material culture in the areas that are eventually Israelite settlements during the time that ancient Israel became a distinct polity.¹³ Such continuity of material culture, and likewise linguistic relatedness, suggests that the “early Israelites” were already at home and

12 See note 16 below for Ezra’s negative and excluding characterization of the “peoples of the land,” which constitutes another example of foreignization within a Judean post-exilic setting.

13 For a concise treatment of the data for early Israel’s origins, see Anson Rainey, “Inside, Outside: Where Did the Early Israelites Come From?” *BAR* 34:06 (Nov/Dec 2008): 45–50. For more in depth discussion of the range of data and scholarly views, see Lawrence E. Stager, “The Archeology of Family in Ancient Israel,” *BASOR* 260 (1985):1–36; Joseph A. Callaway, “The Settlement in Canaan: The Period of the Judges,” in *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, rev. and exp. ed., ed. Hershel Shanks (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 55–90; Stager, “Forging and Identity: The Emergence of Ancient Israel,” in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford, 1998), 123–75; John Bright, “Exodus and Conquest: The Formation of the People Israel,” *A History of Israel* (4th ed.; Louisville: Westminster, 2000), 107–43; Ann E. Killebrew, *Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity: An Archeological Study of Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, and Early Israel, 1300-1100 B.C.E.* (Atlanta: SBL, 2005); Peter Machinist, “Outsiders or Insiders: The Biblical View of Emergent Israel and Its Contexts,” in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History*, ed. Robert L. Cohn and Laurence J. Silberstein (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 35–69); Philip R. Davies, *In Search of “Ancient Israel”* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1992).

were part of the population that biblical authors eventually construct and describe as “strange/foreign.”

Two labels typically associated with the dispossession aspect of the biblical story are Canaan and Canaanite. These terms have many meanings: a proper name for a person, a territory designation, a gentilic population term, and even a generic term for the “merchant” trade. Canaan is, first, Noah’s grandson, the person named Canaan, whose descendants become the Canaanites, according to the Genesis 10 ethnographic genealogy. Genesis 9:18-27 provides the J source backstory to the notion that the Canaanite people ought to be subjugated: Canaan’s descendants are cursed to serve the descendants of Shem because Canaan’s father Ham accidentally saw Noah’s passed-out drunk naked body.¹⁴ While this curious story does not bode well for the Canaanites as a literary people, it does affirm at least a distant kinship between Canaanites and Israelites, who purportedly descend from Shem. This ethnographic story for Canaanite ancestry is compatible with negative portrayals of Canaanites in other passages and sources. However, if we are to appreciate how biblical authors utilize the Canaanites as a rhetorical and theological device, we ought to resist generalizing any specific portrayal as a hermeneutic through which to understand all portrayals. Rather, various authors utilize the category and label to gain purchase for their competitive stances on issues such as the land, purity, ritual, and legal mores, as exhibited in the following examples.

In addition to the term Canaan as a personal name for the Canaanite’s eponymous ancestor, more frequently the term Canaan refers to the land that the patriarchs as nomads inhabit. This is similar to Egyptian use of the term *kanana* as a topographic designation for the region on the eastern Mediterranean or Levantine area of West Asia.¹⁵ Finally, Canaan refers

14 On the highly problematic afterlives of the notion that Canaan is cursed to be a slave, see David M. Goldenberg, “Ham Sinned and Canaan Was Cursed?!” in *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton, 2003) 157–167; Benjamin Braude, *The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Williamsburg, Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1997). On interpretations of Ham’s wrong-doing as sexual in nature, see Stephen R. Haynes, “A Black Sheep in the (Second) First Family,” in *Noah’s Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford, 2007), 23–40; Stephen Gero, “The Legend of the Fourth Son of Noah,” *HTR* 73 (1980): 321–30. For important critique of “ethnic stereotyping” via characterization of “deviant sexual practice,” see Kenneth A. Stone, “The Hermeneutics of Abomination: On Gay Men, Canaanites, and Biblical Interpretation,” *BTB* 27.2 (1997): 36–41.

15 There are sixteen occurrences of the place name and/or ethnological designation in Egyptian texts, such as Amenhotep III’s topographical list from Soleb, Seti I’s war scene at Karnak, Ramses II’s topographical list from his temple at Amara West, and the Merneptah Stele. For discussion of these and other examples as well as scholarly interpretation of the Egyptian designation and debates regarding its range and significance, see Michael G. Hasel, “Pa-Canaan in the Egyptian New Kingdom: Canaan or Gaza,” *JAEI* 1:1 (2009): 8–17; Neils-Peter Lemche, *The Canaanites and Their Land: The Biblical Tradition of the Canaanites* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); Nadav Na’aman, “The Canaanites and Their

to the people living in this region of Canaan, along with occurrences of the gentilic, patrial, or demonym form Canaanite (*kəna'anîy*), in sum 167 occurrences. Many occurrences are straightforward and neutral, for example, the so-called Table of Nations in Genesis 10, which functions as a broad ethnographic account for the whole ancient Mediterranean world, identifies Canaanite groups and boundaries (Gen 10:15-19; similarly, 1 Chron 1). Another common example: Canaan is included among the list of peoples to be dispossessed from the land. Yahweh promises this to Abraham in the J account (Gen 15:19-21), and similarly the P account features the deity promising Abraham all the land of Canaan without mentioning the groups therein (Gen 17). Dispossession is also prominent in narratives featuring Moses (Exod 3:8; 3:17; 13:5; 23:23; 33:2; Deut 7:1) as well as narratives featuring the people approaching the land and subsequently Joshua and the people attaining the land (Josh 3:10; 24:11).

The notion of dispossession does not mean that the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Jebusites, Gergashites, Hivites, and Perizzites are “bad” people. Rather, it indicates that the featured deity is choosy, by which I mean that he is particular about his preferences. This characteristic complements the biblical theme of Yahweh selecting Israel as his portion (as in Deut 32:9; Deut 7:6; 14:2; 1 Kgs 8:53; Ps 135:4; Isa 41:8), with the caveat that what group or set of groups claim the designation “Israel” varies across specific geo-political contexts throughout our timeline of biblical history and post-biblical tradition. The reciprocal requirement to the deity’s pickiness for Israel is that his people must show exclusive covenant loyalty.

Many texts exhibit the notion that intermingling with Canaanites might lead to the Israelites abrogating exclusive covenant loyalty by association with their gods, as in Exod 34:10-16 and Num 33:50-56.¹⁶ According to these passages, the people’s divinely endorsed possession of the land is intertwined with the deity or people ridding the land of its inhabitants, though here not killing them. Both passages require the people to destroy the inhabitants’

Land: A Rejoinder,” *UF* 26 (1994): 397–418; Anson Rainey, “Who is a Canaanite?: A Review of the Textual Evidence,” *BASOR* 310 (1998): 19–24.

¹⁶ Additional texts relevant to the topic of intermarriage include the following: Gen 28:1-9 features Isaac’s preference for a non-Canaanite daughter-in-law. This does not necessarily imply concern regarding the character of Canaanites. Rather, this reflects an endogamous ideal, exhibited by the narrative details that patriarchs Isaac and Jacob marry their first cousins. This reference to potential marriage with Canaanites in Gen 28 is thus relatively neutral compared to Ezra’s dramatic renunciation of intermarriage as a transgression (Ezra 9). Ezra 9:1-2 builds on earlier warnings, such as recorded in Exod 34:11-12, 15-16, that Israelites/Judeans ought not to intermarry with the inhabitants of Canaan in order to avoid the risk of abrogating exclusive covenant loyalty by adopting cultic practices of those peoples. Ezra applies the restriction to the post-exilic “peoples of the land” and extends the concern to mixing the “holy seed” (Ezra 9:1-2, 11-12). With this expansive interpretation, Ezra associates his contemporary “peoples of the land,” which most certainly included people who were Judean and Israelite but whose ancestors had not experienced exile in Babylon, with the Canaanites and other peoples who are repeatedly mentioned in narratives of attaining the land as fated to be dispossessed.

cultic objects (Exod 34:13; Num 52). The Exodus passage explicitly clarifies that interaction with the cultic objects and sharing offering meals constitute threats to the exclusive covenant loyalty that Yahweh demands from his people (Exod 34:14-16). In the same vein, Numbers features Moses reporting that the deity threatens to drive his people from their not yet gained land if they do not fully expel their neighbors (Num 33:55-56).

The Deuteronomistic treatment of the dispossession theme shares the concern with exclusive covenant loyalty, but differs in treatment of the current inhabitants. Exclusive covenant loyalty is required in order possess the land, and as in Exod 34 and Num 33, the people must destroy various cultic items. Rather than the deity or people expelling the inhabitants, the Israelites must “smite” them (using the verbal root *nkḥ*) and perform *ḥrm* against them, typically translated “ban,” “devote,” or even “utterly destroy” (Deut 7:1-5).¹⁷ Such Deuteronomistic treatment of Canaanites served ideological purposes, directed against disfavored behaviors among Judeans within the historical context of the text’s compositional development. A plausible historical context is the late seventh century BCE reign of the Judean king Josiah, to whom biblical historiographic narrative attributes social and cultic reforms.¹⁸ There is no suggestion that the Canaanites are doing something inherently wrong in honoring their own gods, just that it would be unacceptable for Israel to join them in doing so. Deut 4:19; Deut 32:8; and Judges 11:24 all imply an understanding that each people has their appropriate god to honor. Even 1 Kings 11, which derides specific deities, or, more likely, the icons representing them, as *šḡqūš* “detestable thing” (I Kgs 11:5, 7), is concerned with Solomon’s purported disregard for exclusive covenant loyalty. I return to the importance of scrutinizing the content and valence of “Canaanite behavior” on a case-by-case basis below, especially for recognizing foreignization and rhetorical use of the label “Canaanite” for Judean behaviors.

In contrast to the passages just discussed, Lev 18:3, 24-30, which is ascribed to the P source, uses language of uncleanness (*tāmē*) and abomination¹⁹ (*tô‘ēbāl*) when referring to

17 Among many scholars, both John J. Collins and Ziony Zevit discuss biblical and extra-biblical uses of, as well as potential meanings of and literary contexts for *ḥrm* (John J. Collins, “The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence,” *JBL* 122 [2003]: 3–21; Ziony Zevit, “The Search for Violence in Israelite Culture and the Bible,” in *Religion and Violence: The Biblical Heritage* [ed. David Bernat and Jonathan Klawans; Sheffield, 2008], 16–37, 24–34).

18 Collins, “The Zeal of Phinehas,” 11; Zevit, “The Search for Violence in Israelite Culture and the Bible,” 26.

19 The notion “abomination” appears within a particular theological logic that some biblical authors articulate when presenting the relationship of Judeans to the land and patron deity. Many biblical passages exhibit the idea that “abomination” threatens the deity’s presence such that the deity might leave or cause the people to leave (Lev 18:24-30; Deut 18:12; Jer 2:7-8; Ezek 33:26; Mal 2:11; 1 Kg 14:24; 2 Kg 16:3; 2 Kg 21:2, 10-16; 2 Chron 33:2; 2 Chron 36:5-8; 2 Chron 36:14; Ezra 9:1, 11, 14). Within social groups or literary corpora that features such a category, “abomination” as a construct is contingent on norms and interests. The biblical anthology labels as “abomination” the following:

Canaanite behaviors that the people are not supposed to do. This passage gives the vivid notion of the land vomiting out its inhabitants because things they supposedly did, here considered “abominations,” have “defiled” the land. This passage portrays Canaanite behavior as essentially negative, but there are two important caveats: first, the rhetorical point is to warn the Israelites that if they do these same things the land will vomit them out as well; and second, the particular behaviors being outlawed are things like incest and bestiality, which we should not assume to be normative or characteristically “Canaanite” behaviors. Rather, this is an excellent example of foreignization as a rhetorical strategy. Even without primary data that quantitatively surveys ancient sexual activity and norms for “Canaanites,” nor “Israelites” for that matter, we can discern the strategic value of portraying the former inhabitants of the land in this unflattering manner. When we study foreignization in our primary texts we can see creativity and nuance as ancient authors construct notions of *Self* and *Other* as a means to parse out prescriptive behaviors and to claim authority to distinguish among exclusive and inclusive group boundaries.

The problem, among both popular and scholarly interpretations, is when particular portrayals of Canaanite, like that in Lev 18, are applied as a hermeneutic throughout the biblical anthology, using the rhetorical construct of “Canaanite” “abominable” behavior to explain the role of Canaan and Canaanites in various biblical stories, or worse to reconstruct a fictitious caricature of some homogenous, “depraved” historical Canaanites.²⁰ Such faulty

various disfavored sexual acts such as many forms of incest, bestiality, and sex with a menstruating woman (Lev 18; Lev 20); disfavored types of divinatory practices (Lev 20:6, 27; Deut 18:10-12; 2 Kg 21:6); failing to distinguish between clean and unclean living things (Lev 20:25; Deut 14:3); non-Yahwistic iconography (Deut 7:25-26; Deut 27:15; 2 Kg 21:7; 2 Kg 23:13); offering animals with blemish (Deut 17:1); ritual killing of humans (Lev 18:21; Lev 20:2-5; Deut 12:31; Deut 18:10; 2 Kg 16:3; 2 Kg 21:6; 2 Chron 28:3); abrogating exclusive covenant loyalty (Deut 13:14; 17:2-4; 20:18; 32:16; 2 Kg 21:1-5); women wearing clothing associated with men and men wearing clothing associated with women (Deut 22:5); making a vow offering to Yahweh using an animal or goods that have been given as payment to a prostitute (Deut 23:18); remarrying one’s ex-wife (Deut 24:4); using unfair weights and measures (Deut 25:13-16). This range exhibits that the biblical category “abomination” includes both regulations that we might label “civil” laws or social mores as well as rules that we might label “ritual” or “priestly” regulations. I also list this summary of “abominations” within my discussion of “conquest” and Canaanites as they pertain to representations of violence within the biblical anthology in Debra Scoggins Ballentine, “Violence and the Bible,” *The Cambridge World History of Violence*, vol. 1, ed. Linda Fabiger, Garrett Fagan, Mark Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). See also the excellent discussion by Carly L. Crouch “What Makes a Thing Abominable? Observations on the Language of Boundaries and Identity Formation from a Social Scientific Perspective,” *VT* 65 (2015): 516–41.

²⁰ For critiques of this outdated and problematic treatment of Canaanites, see Herbert Niehr, “‘Israelite’ Religion and ‘Canaanite’ Religion,” in *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah*, ed. Francesca Stavrakopoulou and John Barton (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 23–36; Lester Grabbe, “‘Canaanite’: Some Methodological Observations in Relation to Biblical Study,” in *Ugarit and the Bible: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Ugarit and the Bible, Manchester, September 1992*, ed. George J. Brooke, Adrian Curtis, and John F. Healey (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 1994), 113–122; Delbert R. Hillers,

generalization and subsequent explanation exemplifies the methodological misunderstanding or malpractice that I call “mis-foreignization.” For example, if we use Lev 18’s notion of Canaanite “bad behavior” as a lens to interpret Deut 7, the passage discussed above that also features the Canaanites, we might miss that Deut 7 is concerned with exclusive covenant loyalty and therefore labels Canaanite *icons* as “abominations” (Deut 7:25-26), not Canaanites themselves nor Canaanite honoring of non-Yahwistic deities. Similarly, Psalm 106 is best understood as focusing on abrogation of exclusive covenant loyalty as the reason that Yahweh allowed his people to be subjugated. The problem is not Canaanites being essentially Canaanite in some hypothetical qualitative manner, but rather Yahweh’s people doing cultic activities that they are not supposed to do. The references to Canaanites and “nations” in Psalm 106 serve to critique disfavored Israelite and Judean behavior. We misunderstand whom is the object of critique if we take this passage as an accurate description of Canaanites. Likewise, the disdainful critique of personified Lady Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16 identifies the land of the Canaanites as her birthplace, from an Amorite father and Hittite mother. While such a family background for Lady Jerusalem contributes to her unfortunate characterization, it is clear that the “abominations,” for which Yahweh is aggressively shaming her, are abrogations of her covenant with Yahweh who is characterized as Lady Jerusalem’s violently retributive owner, lover, and husband.²¹ The importance of scrutinizing scholarly characterizations of Canaanites, including those implicit within translations, is further exhibited in the few cases in which *kāna’an* and *kāna’anîy* are sometimes rendered “merchant/s” or “trafficker/s”, rather than Canaan or Canaanites: Isa 23:8, 11; Ezek 17:4; Hos 12:7; Zeph 1:1; Job 41:6; and Prov 31:24. Any qualitative or “moralizing” mischaracterization of Canaan/Canaanites would obviously obfuscate the meaning of the terms in these contexts.

Having a broader range of meaning than the term “Canaanite,” the term *gōy* most often appears in its plural form *gōyîm*, and as a category, *gōyîm* shares similar issues of negative

“Analyzing the Abominable: Our Understanding of Canaanite Religion,” *JQR* 75 (1985): 253–269; Mark S. Smith, “Ugaritic Studies and Israelite Religion: A Retrospective View,” *NEA* 65.1 (2002): 17–29; Izak Cornelius, “Excursus: The ‘Canaanite Cult of Lust’ - A Leaf from the Reception History of Syro-Palestinian Religion and Iconography,” in *The Many Faces of the Goddess: The Iconography of the Syro-Palestinian Goddesses Anat, Astarte, Qedesbet, and Asherah C.1500-1000*, (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 204; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 11–13; Gregorio del Olmo Lete, “The History of the Study of Canaanite Religion,” *Canaanite Religion According to the Liturgical Texts of Ugarit*, 2nd ed., trans. W. G. E. Watson (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2014), 1–6.

²¹ Ezekiel 16 overflows with notions that warrant further discussion, especially of the metaphorical woman’s body, her objectification, the abusive punishment she endures, and constructs of sexuality and gender. For discussion, see Mary E. Shields, “Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender Characterization in Ezekiel 16,” *JFSR* 14.1 (1998): 5–18; S. Tamar Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic Chaos: A Study in the Book of Ezekiel* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 2003); Peggy L. Day, “The Bitch Had It Coming To Her: Rhetoric and Interpretation in Ezekiel 16,” *BibInt* 8 (2000): 231–55.

characterizations, problematic translations, and strategic use within competitive discourses. The term *gōyīm* is often translated “nations” and is rendered as *ta ethnē* in the LXX. Many instances display a neutral valence. For example, this word is even used inclusively of the Israelites or Judeans, such as in the Priestly source’s account of Abraham’s covenant in Gen 17, he is promised to be the father of many *gōyīm* (Gen 17:14). However, among the over 500 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible the term is often used when nations are being contrasted with Israel or Judah, and sometimes with an explicitly negative valence, so much so that the King James Version translates it as “heathen.” For example, you can hear the disdain dripping in this syrupy King James translation of Ps 106:35: “they were mingled among the heathen and learned their ways.” So again, we have foreignization, the rhetorical strategy in the primary text of linking *gōyīm* “nations” with behaviors that Israel ought not do. Then we have “mis-foreignization,” the secondary characterization of “the nations” as “heathen,” an obviously anachronistic category that would hinder critical comparative study. Of course, the King James Version is interested in providing aesthetically and theologically useful translations, not critical comparative study. Nonetheless, I chose this example for two reasons: first, when the translation provides a possible dynamic equivalence by substituting “heathen” for “nations” to spell out the poet’s point, the reader does not have the opportunity to appreciate the subtlety of the poet’s diction, that is, how the poet portrays “the nations” negatively for rhetorical purposes. Second, while the King James Version does not aim to foster critical comparative study, the substitution of “heathen” for “nations” is not far from scholarly works that refer to “pagans” in Iron Age Canaan or characterize Israel and Judah as fundamentally different from their neighbors.²² Rather than taking such *Othering* labels at face value, as descriptive terms, we may instead recognize them as key indicators of competing claims and competitive discourses at play within the text and/or the historical background of its composition.

The final set of terms here considered feature *Othering* descriptives to categorize divine beings: *’elōhīm ’ahērīm* is often translated “other gods”²³; *’elōhê-nēkār* is often translated “strange gods”²⁴; and *’el zār* or *zārīm* are often translated “foreign gods.” All three of these are usually

22 For discussion of the term and category “paganism” as “the pre-Christian religions of Europe and the Near East,” see Ronald Hutton, *Pagan Britain* (London: Oxford, 2014), viii–ix; for examples and discussion of use of the term “pagan” as a generic way to designate phenomena that is “not Israelite,” see *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnson (Cambridge: Belknap, 2004), 17, 30, 181, 609; Christopher B. Hays, “The Egyptian Goddess Mut in Iron Age Palestine: Further Data from Amulets and Onomastics,” *JNES* 71.2 (2012): 299–314; Jon Levenson, “Is there a Counterpart in the Hebrew Bible to Christian Anti-Semitism?” *JES* 22 (1985): 242–60, 257.

23 There are about 70 occurrences “other gods” *’elōhīm ’ahērīm* in the Hebrew Bible. The phrase occurs once in the singular *’el ’ahēr* (Exod 34:14). Usually, this is rendered in Greek with *theoi allotrioi* and sometimes *theoi heteroi*. The Vulgate renders this *deos alienos*.

24 *’elōhê-nēkār* is less common and is also rendered in the Greek *theoi allotrioi* (Judges 10:16; 1 Sam 7:3; Jer 5:19; Gen 35:2, 4, which we ascribe to the E source; and 2 Chron 33:15) and sometimes *theoi*

rendered *theoi allotrioi* in Septuagint translations and sometimes *theoi heteroi*. There is fluidity among these categories in many verses. For example, Josh 24 correlates “other gods” and “strange gods.” Specifically, Josh 24:2 and 24:16 use *’elohim ’aherim* “other gods” followed by *’elohê-nêkâr* in 24:20, suggesting a degree of equivalence in these terms. Likewise, Ps 81:9 features “foreign god” and “strange god” in parallel: “There shall not be among you any *’el zâr*, nor shall you all bow down to any *’el nêkâr*.” As a set, “other/strange/foreign gods” are *Their gods* not *Our god(s)*, as the following examples indicate: Deut 6:14 explicitly defines “other gods” as “gods of the peoples around you.” Deut 31:16 calls them “gods of the strangers of the land.” Most likely synonymous is *nêkâr* as “foreign [god]” in 2 Chron 14:3 and Neh 13:30. Similarly, *hablê-nêkâr* “strange vanities” in Jer 8:19 suggests disfavored deities or cultic practices. Psalm 44:20 contrasts the term “our god” with the term “foreign god.” Isaiah 43:12 using just *zâr*, but implying an *’el zâr*, distinguishes Yahweh as the god who acts among his people when no *zâr* would or did. Deuteronomy 32:12, 16-17 reminisces that when there was no *’el nêkâr* “strange god,” all was fine, but that the people made Yahweh envious via *zârîm* “foreign [gods]” or “foreign [practices],” at which point all goes badly. Here, the *zârîm*, whether understood as gods or practices, are identified with “abominations,” and gods “they did not know,” *neveau* gods, and *shêdîm*.²⁵ The wordplay using *zârîm* and *nêkâr* in Jer 5:19 suggests familiarity with these related notions in that the transgressive act of the people serving *nêkâr* gods within their own land will be fittingly repaid by the people having to serve *zârîm* in a land that is not theirs. Jeremiah 3:13 considers some sort of activity done under trees regarding *zârîm* to indicate not listening to Yahweh’s dictates. Here, *zârîm* plausibly stands in as a descriptor for gods, with the activity rendered “you have scattered your ways to *zârîm* under every green tree” being some sort of honoring of *zârîm* [gods]. It is instructive to compare “strange gods” with “strange fire” *’esh zârâb* (Lev 10:1) and “strange incense” *qêtoret zârâb* (Exod 30:9), to emphasize that the notion we are translating as *strangeness* or *foreignness* is best understood as *that which is not commanded for Israel/Judah*, rather than something that is essentially bad. A similar example is the “strange woman” of Proverbs 7, whose company is warned against because she is the wife of another man.²⁶ As with the treatment of Canaan and

heteroi (as in Josh 24:20, which is followed by *theoi allotrioi* in Josh 24:23). We see the singular form *’el nêkâr* in Deut 32:12 and Mal 2:11, and the singular form *’elôah nêkâr* in Dan 11:39.

²⁵ The term *shêdîm* occurs only here (Deut 32:17) and Ps 106:37-38, which associates them with disfavored ritual killing of sons and daughters, framed here as an activity that pollutes (using *hnp*) the land, and places *shêdîm* in parallel with Canaanite icons. Typical translations of *shêdîm* as “idols,” “demons,” “devils,” or “false gods,” are not satisfactory in that they go beyond what we can glean from the limited two biblical references to *shêdîm* and also employ anachronistic or ill-fitting substitutes, as I argue in an upcoming study entitled, “*Shêdîm*: Shades of Difference Between “Demons” and God(s).”

²⁶ Michael Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18 (New Haven: Yale, 2000), 134–40.

Canaanite above, the root issue with “other,” “strange,” or “foreign” gods is exclusive covenant loyalty. Categorically, these descriptors are utilized to critique behavior that is deemed improper for Israelites and Judeans, and they feature within theological apologies for Israelite and Judean misfortunes. The examples above exhibit that the rhetorical effect of these categorizations of deities as “strange,” “other,” and “foreign” relies on foreignization. Within the biblical anthology, each of the terms discussed above, “foreign,” Canaanite, “other gods,” and “foreign gods,” alerts the reader to competition over boundaries pertaining to groupness, land, origins, “proper” cultus, and/or social norms. These are issues of central concern throughout the biblical meta-narrative, and attentiveness to foreignization as a rhetorical strategy facilitates our understanding of the contingent claims that biblical authors make about the Israelite and Judean people and the land.

Conclusion: Polemics, Foreignization, and Competing Perspectives

Going forward, one benefit of having identified the relevant terminology, as above, is that we are prepared to analyze foreignization as a rhetorical strategy employed in the biblical anthology. Moreover, we know to avoid “mis-foreignization” in our explanations of the data and scholarly reconstructions of ancient social groupings, theology, and cultic activities.²⁷ Modern scholars are familiar with the notion of “reading against the grain” of biblical texts to uncover perspectives alternative to those asserted by the narrator. As Susan Ackerman says when speaking specifically about Judean religion in the sixth century:

Moreover, by recognizing the polemical nature of the prophetic critiques and by resolving to read these critiques without prophetic prejudice and instead with a non-judgmental eye, we can place ourselves in a position to re-evaluate the traditional descriptions of the sixth-century cult.²⁸

²⁷ Elsewhere, I have analyzed the case of the Queen of Heaven in Jeremiah 7 and 44 as an example of foreignization within the primary text as well as “mis-foreignization” within scholarly treatments (Ballentine, “A Commentary on the Queen of Heaven, ‘Foreign Gods,’ ‘Other Gods,’ and Theological Apologies in Jeremiah 44,” [submitted for review]). Much of the material in this essay originally served as background for considering the category “foreign” as applied to the Queen of Heaven (Ballentine, “The (Mis)Foreignization Problem in Hebrew Bible Studies,” conference paper delivered at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Conference, Atlanta, GA, November 23, 2015).

²⁸ Susan Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth Century Judah* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 3.

When we “read against the grain” of statements that seem to be grounded in claims about the “foreign,” Canaanites, and “other,” what yields? I propose that it indicates shared discourse and competing perspectives regarding the very things that an oversimplified portrayal of the biblical meta-narrative would present as distinct or even *sui generis* and as given or god-given.

One aim of emphasizing continued scrutiny and improvement of how we understand primary and secondary uses of categories such as “foreign” is to uncover the perspectives of speakers or characters who are disenfranchised, non-elite, or underrepresented types of characters, in order to discuss issues of gender, social class, and group boundary-making or *Us-Them* self-understanding, as I have discussed throughout this article. With this aim, I am building on the work of many scholars whose areas of expertise range across Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Rabbinic literature, such as Saul Olyan, Susan Niditch, Ross Kraemer, Stan Stowers, Elizabeth Clark, Daniel Boyarin, Amy-Jill Levine, and Michael Satlow.²⁹ These scholars, of course, have grounded their own theoretical and methodological advancements within religious studies in the theoretical work of Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Pierre Bourdieu, among others.³⁰

With the aim of uncovering competing perspectives, we ask questions about who is representing whom and to what ends. In doing so, study of each case in which the categories “foreign,” “other,” or “Canaanite” are operative enriches our understanding of each biblical passage, as I have demonstrated above, and improves our perspectives on relevant comparative data. I am interested in the impact of framing our discussions of the “foreign” in a way that challenges all biblical scholars, commentators, and translators to resist reproducing ideologies and theological preferences furthered within our primary texts. Such reframing of many “biblical studies topics” with more cross-disciplinary concepts, terms, and approaches would facilitate dialogue with our colleagues in other fields. Too often, the biblical scholarship

29 Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Saul Olyan, “‘And with a male You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman’: On the Meaning and Significance of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13,” *JHS* 5 (1994): 179–206; Susan Niditch, “Women in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. J. Baskin (Detroit: Wayne State, 1991), 25–43; Stanley Stowers, “Mythmaking, Social Formation and Varieties of Social Theory,” in *Redescribing Christian Origins*, ed. Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 489–505; Elizabeth Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2004); Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2006); Amy-Jill Levine, “Diaspora as Metaphor: Bodies and Boundaries in the Book of Tobit,” in *Diaspora Jews and Judaism. Essays in Honor of, and in dialogue with, A. Thomas Kraabel*, ed. A. Overman and R. S. MacLennan (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 105–17; and Michael Satlow, “Fictional Women: A Study in Stereotypes,” in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Greco-Roman Culture III*, TSAJ 93, ed. P. Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 225–43.

30 Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Jacques Derrida, “Biodegradables: Seven Diary Fragments,” *CritInq* 15.4 (1989): 812–73; Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* (New York: Macmillan, 1986).

with which our colleagues in Classics, History, Literature, or Anthropology are familiar is outdated or exhibits outdated notions of biblical cultus and theology as radically distinct from the cultus and theology of ancient Israel and Judah's neighbors. This is a barrier to comparative study. In revising problematic category-based explanations, we facilitate comparative analysis and attain fuller reconstructions of what potential social and religious dynamics the biblical anthology preserves.

For example, when Othmar Keel discusses what he terms "vertical ecumenism" for the history of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, he addresses the strong intertwining of ancient Israelite with pre-existing Canaanite traditions. A stated goal of his is to argue that "theists" and "naturalists" share more and are less "radically opposed" than prior scholarship has suggested.³¹ My perspective on the relationships among biblical and neighboring peoples and religions is obviously dependent upon and inspired by the work of scholars such as Keel, which has been generative of critical comparative scholarly discussion for several decades. My aim is to foster a continued sharpening of such discussion, for example, by dropping any reliance on the categories "monotheism," "polytheism," and "pagan" that many scholars, including Keel, utilized in prior works. I regard this as a crucial step in advancing our analysis of ancient society and religion.

Our contemporary socio-political context calls for analysis of foreignization, and all other forms of *Othering*, as well as scrutiny of "mis-foreignization." Bruce Lincoln helpfully distinguishes between characterizing characters or groups as different from one another in various ways that maintain "mutual freedom, respect, and affection," versus "essentializing alterity" between characters or groups whose separateness and differences are presented as irreconcilable and primary rather than "secondary, accidental, and reversible."³² More generally, Gustavo Benavides discusses how "the practices named religion are concerned above all else with the management of difference."³³ The label "foreign" often serves as an evaluative statement, rather than a neutral descriptive term in ancient West Asian and ancient Mediterranean literature. "Foreign," Canaanite, and "other" become distinctions of "essentializing alterity" in some biblical texts and especially in interpretations of them. We may learn a great deal through critical analysis of such rhetoric about the ways that ancient authors managed, manufactured, and competed over difference. As scholars, we also have the opportunity and responsibility to scrutinize second-order categories that run the risk of

31 Othmar Keel, *Kanaan-Israel-Christentum. Plädoyer für eine "vertikale" Ökumene* (Münster: Franz-Delitzsch-Vorlesungen 2001), 166–67.

32 Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford, 2014), 180–83.

33 Gustavo Benavides, "Stratification," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (New York: Continuum, 2000), 297–313, 312.

reproducing the interested stances of the ancient authors we study. When comparing biblical to extra-biblical data, the “foreignness” of some phenomena has minimal explanatory value for understanding differences between biblical and extra-biblical representations of society and cult. Rather, it indicates competition over contingent categories.