CHAPTER ONE

The Nations in Nero's Nightmare

Nero, who executed Paul of Tarsus,[1] was in quite a difficult situation before he took his own life. He was unpopular and publicly mocked. Revolts by subject peoples were happening all over his empire around the year 68 C.E. According to his biographer Suetonius, those who were supposed to have faith (*fides*) in Rome's *imperium*—notably peoples in the hard-won Gallic provinces and Spain—were in a state of unrest. We also know that at this time trouble was brewing in the south among the Judeans, who called Jerusalem their capital and refused to worship an image of the emperor as deity. This particular emperor is reported to have persecuted the "Christians," who were a "race of men given to a new and mischievous superstition" (Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2),[2] that is, they had a "hatred of humanity" (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44)—meaning, of course, humanity as the Romans promoted it. Nero lamented to his nurse that he was suffering the "unheard of and unparalleled fate" of losing "supreme power" (*summum imperium*) while still alive. He also was given to frightening dreams, portents, and omens about his coming fate. Among the dreams is that he was steering a ship and the helm was taken from his hands; that his wife Octavia dragged him into the darkness; that he was covered with a swarm of flying ants; and that the images of the nations dedicated in Pompey's theater surrounded him and kept him from moving (Suetonius, *Nero* 46.1). Each one of these nightmares is tied to Nero's impending fall from the heights of political power.

The question of what, precisely, the *simulacra gentium*—images of the nations—that came to life in Pompey's theater might have looked like can be addressed by a quick glance at the recently re-discovered Julio-Claudian Sebasteion at Aphrodisias in Asia Minor. Here, at the largest Roman imperial cult complex found to date, one particular image of the nations stands out (figure 1).[3] A man and a woman are carved in high relief. The man is almost naked except for a cloak and military helmet. He is holding the woman down with his knee, and it looks as if he is about to violate her sexually or kill her. No matter the action, the scene depicted is clearly violent. The female figure also is scantily clad, her right breast is bared, and she looks out since her head is being held up by the man's left hand. The couple is identified by an inscription: the man is the emperor Claudius; the woman is Britannia. She represents the territory and people of Britain—the islands north of the European mainland. She is an image of the nation called Britannia.

Figure 1. The emperor Claudius subdues Britannia, personified as a woman; from the Sebasteion (temple to Augustus) at Aphrodisias. Photo © New York University/Institute of Fine Arts Excavations of Aphrodisias.

Lest we think the Aphrodisian Britannia is an island in her position vis-à-vis Rome, perhaps we should try to envision what she could see from underneath Claudius's leg. Across the processional way from her pinned-down body was found a series of what archaeologists believe could have been approximately fifty nation images, each of them a woman, each of them labeled according to their Greek name and territorial designation, for example *ETHNOUS PIROUSTŌN* to signify a vaguely Gallic nation somewhere in the Alps.[4] The nations, who had been defeated and enslaved by Roman military power, were displayed as part of the sculptural program of a public space honoring the emperors as gods. If these *simulacra gentium* were similar to those in Pompey's theater at Rome, then we could imagine a group of captive women coming to life, climbing down from their pedestals, surrounding the embattled Nero, and working together to keep him from moving.

New Testament scholars and other interpreters have not been able to imagine what Nero's fearful dream about the images of the nations has to do with Paul—the Jewish man he had beheaded, according to legend—or the letters Paul wrote to communities all over the Roman Empire that now are canonized as scripture. Yet Paul wrote to Gallic peoples whose uprisings concerned Nero—the assemblies

of Galatia—and he also expressed a wish to visit those rebellious Spaniards in his letter to the emperor's home city. And like Nero, Paul also had a vision of being surrounded by the nations. Only Paul did not wait for them to come to life out of Pompey's theater; he went to resurrect them, to pull them out from under Claudius's triumphant body, out from their decorative position in public spaces. Paul sat the nations down to eat. If we examine Paul's rhetoric in light of such images, we can see that his "good news" to the nations is that they no longer are captive and enslaved to a victorious general or raped and killed by divine emperors, but are (re-) born as children of Abraham and belong to the God who brought the Israelites (and others) out of Egypt.

> God was pleased to reveal his son in me, that I might proclaim him among the nations (*en tois ethnesin,* Gal 1:16).
>
> The one who worked Peter into an apostle of the circumcision worked me also into the nations (*eis tois ethnesin*, Gal 2:8).
>
> Know, then, that these ones [born] out of faith are sons of Abraham. And having seen that the God would justify the nations (*ta ethnē*) out of faith, the scripture brought the good news to Abraham, that "in you all of the nations (*panta ta ethnē*) will be blessed" (Gal 3:7–8).
>
> Is God of Judaeans alone? Not also of nations (*ethnōn*)? Yes, also of nations (Rom 3:29).

The collective idea represented visually by Britannia and other women's bodies in the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias and, presumably, in Pompey's theater at Rome is linked to the term in Paul's letters quoted above: in Greek *ta ethnē* (Latin *gentes, nationes*). Could it be that Paul is saying that his God—the God of Israel, of the Judeans—is also the God of Britannia being forced to the ground by another "god"? Is Paul saying that the nations of the earth, in Pompey's theater and the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias, are "justified" through loyalty to his God and blessed in Abraham who exhibited that same faith? If so, what exactly would that mean? Could we imagine? Should we?

In the dominant historical imaginary represented by the guild of New Testament scholarship and interpretation, we cannot and should not connect these images and texts to the Bible. There is no meaning possible in such a connection. Paul is not engaged in going toward the nations—the colonized territories, the collectively defeated peoples, the woman about to be vanquished—in order to announce their liberation from the enslavement characteristic of Roman rule. This would be a political agenda, and Paul's conversion and mission should not be about politics.[5] Paul is on a theological mission, inaugurated in the sky and sent blindingly to earth, to evangelize the non-Jewish Gentiles and bring them the good news of individual faith without works in Jesus Christ. In that sense, Nero's dream

about the resurrected *simulacra gentium*, and the complex material and political realities of the Roman Empire it represents, have absolutely nothing to do with Paul's Gentiles.

The Problem with the Nations

Could it really be that Paul's letters were all and only about the spread of a new form of personal faith to individuals who erroneously thought they would be justified by works of the law?[6] Is it true that anything else is a wild dream, wishful thinking, or a figment of the imagination? It seems as if the history of New Testament interpretation would have it this way. After all, scholars of the New Testament and early Christianity know that *ta ethnē*, as used in the New Testament, is the technical theological term for the Gentiles. And the Gentiles, we know, are at the epicenter of Christianity. In major New Testament lexica and reference works, the term *ethnos*, *ethnē* is defined as a religious signifier for non-adherents to the Jewish cult.[7] Even if, at its core, the term symbolizes a collective of people who share kinship, customs, and traditions,[8] in the field of biblical scholarship *ta ethnē* are usually defined and translated as the peoples who are foreign [9] only to the Jews. *Ta ethnē* are also the non-Israelite Christians and unbelievers, even heathens.[10] According to traditional exegetical perspectives, the word for Gentiles, both in the LXX and New Testament, enjoys a small range of meaning "non-sociologically to describe all the peoples who do not belong to the chosen people"[11] and where politics is not at stake, but "the decisive point is the ethico-religious distinction in relation to salvation history."[12]

Indeed, religious terminology and oppositions drive the definition and interpretation of the Gentiles. In the LXX, the term often translates the Hebrew *goyim*, in supposed contrast to the holy people of Israel, who are called *'am*.[13] Staying with this construct appears to strengthen a characterization of the Gentiles as marked by a quality of un-chosenness. Opposed to the Israelites who are chosen by God, the term "conveys a negative judgment from the Jewish standpoint."[14] The radicalness of Paul's gospel, then, is that after he leaves the judgmental constrictions of Judaism behind for the illumination of Christianity, he goes to those who have received harsh negativity and exclusion from his former religious group. By going to the Gentiles, the "unchosen," Paul completes a split from the chosen people of the God of Israel.

Sometimes the terms *ethnos*, *ethnē* are exegetically linked to the term *Hellēn,* for example,[15] based on a cursory review of Paul's use of what scholars think are terms to designate non-Jews. The differences between these terms and the people they represent—Greeks, barbarians, Gentiles, Scythians—does not seem to matter as *Gentiles* is the New Testament's catch-all category for "difference." Even with a slightly broader nationalistic and geographical signification, the Greeks are positioned alongside or equated with the Gentiles because "for the Jews . . . this Greek sphere is a religious rather than political matter . . . already in Jewish

Greek of the period 'Greek' has the accompanying sense of 'hostile to the Jews,' and it thus approximates the term 'Gentile.'"[16] "Gentiles" are "namely, the mass of peoples not previously drawn into salvation history."[17] Once again, Jewishness and non-Jewishness constitute a binary distinction based on religious orientation. So if we were to ask questions only about soteriology and belief in God and, ultimately, Christ, we should be satisfied with the answer: the Gentiles are the "others," the pagans, the morally inferior, the sinners. Theologically and practically, they are the whole point of Christian missionary work, beginning with Paul himself, in order to propogate the right beliefs. Gentiles do not have a real definition or substance of their own, except in relation to Jews and Israel.

That the Gentiles are usually defined in terms of what they are not—Jewish—points to the fact that dichotomy and opposition characterize our understanding of who they are. In this sense they really do differ very little from the ancient "barbarians" who are defined largely by their non-Greekness through stereotypes.[18] But a quite large problem for the study of the New Testament is that Paul's entire mission rests on the Gentiles. They are the peoples to whom he declares himself sent and among whom he negotiates his famous dogmatic life-sentence of "justification by faith." In fact, nothing in Pauline theology can be understood adequately without attention to the positioning of the Gentiles in his rhetoric and vision. Yet this attention has been limited to rehearsal of the theological Jewish-Gentile divide and, in Christian terminology, distinction on the basis of the type of affiliation with Christianity, for example, "Jewish Christian" and "Gentile Christian." Gentile Christians, of course, are definitively associated with the development of Christianity as an entity separate from Judaism. Even relatively recent New Testament scholarship that affirms Paul's thoroughgoing Jewishness does not ask the question of who, precisely, the Gentiles are outside of a construct dependent on differences from Jews.[19] They exist only in an ideal theological other-world, where they are urged to become religious in the right way.

In such an ideal theological world, where the Bible is its own closed semantic system, images such as those depicting Claudius and Britannia, especially, symbolize nothing but the pre-Christian pagan background to the New Testament. Moreover, images cannot have anything to do with the New Testament because they are not literary texts and, therefore cannot communicate in the same way. In real biblical scholarship images always must be subordinated to words. But what if the images of the nations in Pompey's theater that surround Nero in his dream did have something to do with Paul's world? What if the images I began to describe, and others like them, and the structures that produced them, could tell us something about how to imagine the real world of the Pauline letters? What if images of the nations were not in the background as objects but in the foreground as subjects? What if the images of the nations in visual and literary representation—defeated, enslaved, and female—could tell us something about the New Testament's constructions of gender and the mission to the Gentiles? What if the images could help us engender the others the Gentiles represent?

If we remain in the stratosphere with traditional, "rational" biblical scholarship and interpretation, there is no room for exploring and imagining the complexities and political realities of this larger world and, therefore, no opportunity to ask the question that often is not asked: who exactly are the Gentiles, and why is it so important to Paul that they relate to Jews in a different way? Would the Gentiles have understood themselves as non-Jewish and heathens? In an ideal theological world, where there is no real context for Paul's rhetoric besides personal religious piety and struggles over dogmatic correctness, perhaps they would have. However, if we bring the theological world down to earth, that is, to the inhabited earth dominated—in fact, constructed—by the Roman Empire in the first century C.E., we can see that a whole range of issues are currently unsettled concerning Paul's Gentiles. It is the aim of this study to address such issues.

A Gender-Critical Approach to the Problem

A politically undifferentiated, uncritically theological, and dichotomous view of the Gentiles is a major stumbling block to a reinterpretation of Pauline theology. In this study I make the case for a recontextualization and redescription, or "gender-critical re-imagination," of Paul's relationship with the Gentiles through an examination of the ideology of conquest and universal domination in the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire constitutes the world itself in the period encompassing Paul's life and mission, and the Romans represented themselves as destined to rule over that world and bring peace to it by defeating and incorporating not only their perceived enemies but *all* the Gentiles, otherwise known as the nations. The shift toward a gender-critical re-imagination that I propose involves seeing the Gentiles, particularly in Paul's letters, as precisely the enemies—even all the nations including the Jews—destined to be defeated by and incorporated into Roman imperial territorial rule. A gender-critical re-imagination, then, is as much about the figure of Paul himself as it is about the Gentiles. In fact, it is about reconfiguring Paul as apostle to the defeated nations, as subversive to Roman imperial ideology.

When we open our imagination to the Roman Empire as the context for Paul's letters, we must include a reconsideration of this core term of Pauline theology. The signifier Gentiles, when investigated in a Roman imperial context, takes on a more politically multivalent meaning. Besides meaning non-Jews in an individualized and uncritical religious sense, it also refers to peoples conquered by the Romans and incorporated into (i.e., made to serve) their territorial empire. We must realize that when Paul uses the term *ethnē,* there is more to this emergent picture than religious and theological difference from Israel and Judaism. Paul's use of this term has significance within his Jewish framework, to be sure, but a Jewish framework undoubtedly and unavoidably shaped by the Roman imperial metanarrative ordering the whole world at his time. Additionally, Roman imperial visual representation—Claudius and Britannia and similar images—helps us

see both the gendered and sexual connotations of the term *nations*, as well as its broader political relevance.

When brought back to this world, the Gentiles, or nations, are positioned at the busy intersection of empire, colonization, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. Each of these collective identity-signifiers speaks, however polyvalently, in the language of the others. A gender-critical re-imagination of Paul as apostle to the defeated nations that I propose is indebted to several critical and theoretical perspectives in order to arrive at such intersectionality. In the following, I further describe the methodological approach I employ in the following chapters.

So far, I have argued that in most "idealist" scholarly approaches to Paul and the Gentiles the latter term is treated as a purely theological category, where Nero and his nightmares have nothing to do with Paul and his visions. In this section, I situate my own "non-idealist" methodological approach to this interpretive problem. By situate I mean that methodological considerations are not born of nothing or in isolation; the task is to identify specific contemporary hermeneutical concerns that inform my own work, as well as to provide a set of interpretive patterns with which I am in conversation and from which I depart. To that end, I propose a gender-critical re-imagination of Paul as apostle to the defeated nations as part of a non-idealist framework that draws on elements from contemporary empire-critical, postcolonial, feminist, and queer theoretical contributions.

A Non-Idealist Framework

All of the perspectives I consider below as informative to a gender-critical re-imagination—empire-critical, postcolonial, feminist, queer—rely on exposing the situatedness, biases, and veiled objectivism of traditional scholarly exegetical approaches to the New Testament, as well as in many cases a mandate to change social relations in this world in the name of justice for the marginalized. Quests to pull otherworldliness from the sky and situate it in alignment with or in contrast to any world at all, however, are connected to non-idealist, or materialist, approaches to the Bible. Non-idealist approaches engender a re-examination of the historical-critical method of biblical exegesis—which has been co-opted in some sense and turned from its radical roots to decontextualized adherence into a historical scientific positivism[20]—and challenge it once again to become more critical through readdressing its general lack of consideration for "concrete realities of life, such as economic and political power structures, social struggles against oppression, exploitation, discrimination, and so forth."[21]

In a non-idealist framework for biblical interpretation, three interrelated alterations are made to the traditional exegetical task, constituting a significant departure from it. First, historical-critical approaches are manipulated to take into account the concrete social contexts of biblical texts, including political and economic structures, patterns of domination and subordination, and marginalization. Non-idealist readings insist that ideas and texts "do not fall from the sky"[22] but are

products of culture, specifically political and economic structures. Second, authors and readers, in every historical context, reflect embeddedness in and interaction with political and economic structures and social positioning. Because texts (and authors and readers) are products of culture, they must be treated as part of its social texture, which means that for the Bible, a wider variety of cultural artifacts must be considered to describe adequately the "textile" constituting a social context.

Third and perhaps most urgently, a non-idealist reading has social transformation and justice as its agenda. By turning away from idealist readings of the Bible and attending to the first two tasks mentioned above, non-idealist approaches aim to liberate the Bible from appropriations and interpretations aligned with privilege, elitism, and imperialism that masquerade as value-neutral. Such are interpretations that obscure an overall consistent biblical message of liberation from slavery,[23] the "gospel of the poor" at the center of both Testaments.[24] In this sense, the Bible is not seen as necessarily affirming the social texture of which it is a part, but is re-positioned and reclaimed as a counter-narrative that proclaims counter-practices from the margins.

A gender-critical re-imagination of Paul as apostle to the defeated nations is, at its core, a non-idealist mode of reading and seeing New Testament texts. First, I endeavor to bring the Gentiles down to earth and locate them in the material and social realities of the Roman Empire that serves as the historical context for Paul's letters. Second, this re-imagination and recontextualization of the theological Gentiles as the nations destined to be both defeated by Roman rule and restored to the God of Israel is accomplished through analyzing Roman imperial visual and literary representation as part of the social fabric into which Paul is threaded and to which he responds. Third, through this critical re-imagination, I submit that the "gospel for the poor" is reactivated in Paul's "gospel for the defeated nations." This is the case because the nations are not an apolitical category, but signify the marginalized peoples and colonized lands to whom Paul is sent. They are not disembodied, but ideologically located in space and time underneath the emperor's weighty, ever-expanding body. The apostle to the defeated nations advocates their liberation from the slavery of Roman domination via solidarity with Israel, whose forebears were brought out of Egypt and Babylon and whose capital city became a "light to the nations" according to prophetic rhetoric. Paul's letters, then, can be re-read as a "rhetoric of resistance,"[25] promoting alternatives to imperial oppression. The "glue" holding this approach together is the capacity to use re-imagination in the service of making a different future.

Empire-Critical and Postcolonial Frameworks

A gender-critical re-imagination notices the tensions and resistant dynamics in Paul's rhetoric, repositioning them as expressing some form of resistance. When resituated in the Roman Empire, Paul's advice, as well as his manhood and the communities among whom he dwells, are all thrown into drastic relief as anti-imperial. Paul emerges as a Jewish person negotiating his political world and responding not

to dogmatic charges of theological errancy, but to the economic realities of Roman imperial domination. The realization, or really the rediscovery,[26] that the world of Paul, the Jewish person, is the Roman imperial world has led to a major new, increasingly productive, area of scholarship in New Testament studies that seeks to relocate Pauline concepts and strategies in terms of their relation to political and economic relationships, ancient and present. In this sense, "empire-critical"[27] scholarship echoes a non-idealist agenda by its commitment to renewed and reconfigured historical analysis, recognition of the need to pay attention to imperialism ancient and modern, and a concern for transformation of social conditions.

Empire-critical New Testament scholarship on Paul has the advantage of several major methodological maneuvers. Proponents acknowledge that "whether or not to look at the connections between cultural texts and imperialism is therefore to take a position in fact taken—either to study the connection in order to criticize it and think of alternatives for it, or not to study it in order to let it stand."[28] Having decided that imperialism in the modern context is too pernicious to "let it stand," empire-critical approaches bring political sensitivity toward imperial designs to bear on the most influential of ancient cultural texts. First, the New Testament is seen as a collection of documents demonstrating negotiation of and resistance to Roman imperial rule. There is a clear confrontation with what is asserted as a false dichotomy between politics and religion. The anchor of much empire-critical work regarding the New Testament is the Roman imperial cult, considered to be the primary religio-political system operative at Paul's time and to which the letters respond.[29] With a major dualism challenged and the Roman Empire identified as a religious *and* political context, empire-critical approaches draw on non-idealist endeavors to relocate the history of ideas approach toward a history of people and movements over time, especially people who have been and/or are dominated and marginalized and associated movements. Judaism and Christianity, in these perspectives, constitute two such movements in the ancient world.[30]

The interest in explicitly contesting imperialism as a means of seeing the New Testament differently is where empire-critical approaches intersect with postcolonial interpretation. The term postcolonial "describe[s] the modern history of imperialism, beginning with the process of colonialism, through the struggles for political independence, the attainment of independence, and to the contemporary neocolonialist realities."[31] This term "emphasizes the connection and continuity between the past and the present, between the colonizer and the colonized."[32] Yet the very designation "postcolonial" itself implies a commitment to transformation of the present[33] by acknowledging the imperialist misdeeds of history, as well as how imperialism and colonialism have indelibly shaped present discourses, identities, and political and economic structures.[34] Postcolonial subjects[35] are those "whose perception of each other and of economic, political, and cultural relationships cannot be separated from the global impact and constructions of Western/modern imperialism, which still remain potent in forms of neocolonialism, military arrogance, and globalization."[36] In postcolonial studies, the intersecting issues

of land, race, military power, international connectivity, and gender are considered essential to the interpretive enterprise.

Postcolonial modes of dealing with the Bible cannot precisely be called exegesis in the traditional way. This is by choice, because to many adherents of postcolonial biblical interpretation, the point is not to perpetuate usage of the tools promoted by a discipline that is itself inextricably bound to imperialism and colonialism.[37] A major tenet of postcolonial biblical studies is that the academic discourse of biblical exegesis is thoroughly implicated in the perpetuation of imperialism and colonialism.[38] In this sense, a postcolonial approach to the Bible is in alignment with non-idealist methodologies.

However, a significant departure of postcolonial biblical interpretation from non-idealist perspectives is that postcolonial biblical critics treat the traditional tasks and results of exegesis with suspicion. This treatment is partly because of trenchant postcolonial claims that imperial language is contained in the Bible itself, across both Testaments, that mandates and legitimates a colonial project on behalf of both Israel (First Testament) and then Christianity (New Testament) to dominate the ends of the earth.[39] This is a different set of claims and methodological foci than recognizing that the Bible has been used as a tool of and icon for Western imperialism and colonization. Though critics who engage in postcolonial biblical studies endeavor for a "reading of the Bible in which imperialistic strategies are confronted, exposed, and arrested by postcolonial subjects,"[40] often what results is a condemnation of the Bible itself, so that its texts and contradictions are rendered impotent for social transformation from the margins in the present. Thus, a re-reading of the Bible as a cultural artifact and production with the marginalized as its center, with all the problems that brings, is not often promoted in postcolonial biblical interpretation.

The conflation of the colonialism and imperialism thought to be *in* the Bible with that which is *mapped onto* it through the historical usage of the Bible, and a refusal to engage in a practice of counter-reading, do not resolve the thoroughgoing methodological issues that postcolonial biblical study raises. The Bible itself, according to a non-idealist view, has been put "in chains"[41] and colonized; the text is among the victims and casualties of imperialism. One of the main agenda items of non-idealist approaches is the liberation of the Bible. This means a recovery of the option for the poor/marginalized/colonized, through a radical recontextualization and "re-fabric-ation" (placing the Bible in its place as part of the textile of life). In fact, it could be said that postcolonial biblical interpretation, by dismissing such re-discovery as a viable possibility, participates in the continued obfuscation of the Bible's core message of "release of the captives," where the captives are the real subject (not the object) of biblical discourses.[42]

Empire-critical and postcolonial approaches to interpretation of the New Testament are heavy on criticism of established and traditional reading practices, and both propose alternatives to (academic) biblical studies in the name of liberation and self-definition of the marginalized victims of colonization and imperialism. Subject

to debate is whether the Bible itself can be of any use in the formulation of such alternatives or as a tool in the process of liberation, and whether the Bible can really re-emerge as a counter-impression of imperial culture, given its full co-optation and employment in the name of world-wide missionary-style domination.[43]

Significant blind-spots exist in both the empire-critical and postcolonial biblical interpretation that I address throughout this work and are at the intersection of gender analysis and Paul. In terms of gender studies, empire-critical and postcolonial approaches are at times sensitive to the inclusion of women,[44] but are undertheorized concerning the gendered texture of imperialist and colonialist discourses as a whole—even if the entire project of studying empire requires attention to the intersections of gender, race, class, and military power within a context of globalization and alienation. Although Paul is a current hero of empire-critical approaches, I know of no full-length postcolonial treatment of Paul's life and work, including his mission to the nations.[45] Empire-critical and postcolonial studies of the Bible also still place primary emphasis on philology and literary expression, whose prominence as tools for reading is unquestioned, despite art historian Paul Zanker's contribution to *Paul and Empire*.[46]

In contrast to an exclusively literary and philological approach, or an approach that sees visual representation as secondary or illustrative to literary claims, a gender-critical re-imagination seeks to follow up on a distinct lack of attention to visual representation as a crystallization of the basic ideological framework of the Roman Empire through which the Bible, with the defeated nations or colonized others at its center, does in fact emerge as a counter-narrative to colonialism. Inattention to gender and images leaves interpretive gaps and open questions when we look at Britannia underneath Claudius. Her femininity and status as a defeated other land at the margins of the Roman Empire begs for analysis and connection that is currently absent in empire-critical and postcolonial biblical interpretation.[47]

A gender-critical re-imagination seeks to do just this kind of analysis from a non-idealist vantage point of thoroughgoing interest not only in anti-imperial or political formulations of Paul, but such formulations of Paul informed by feminist, queer, and other liberationist agendas and struggles for a different, re-imagined world in the past *and* in the present. In that sense I hear the call for shifting the agenda of biblical studies from sifting the past for the universal and linear history of ideas to searching for a past that is usable for historically dominated and underrepresented peoples, a past that also requires us to ask different questions about the present.[48]

Feminist and Queer Approaches

The gender-critical emphasis of a gender-critical re-imagination is directly connected to feminist and, more recently, queer theories and readings of New

Testament studies and texts. Feminist New Testament studies, in particular, is a massive enterprise that only three decades ago was not very well known or populated. In recent years, major reference works, book series, issues of journals, and academic conferences are devoted to this increasingly diversified path of scholarly inquiry. Queer studies, which has gained more momentum outside of the theological disciplines than within, due at least in part to institutionalized homophobia and heterosexism, also is finding a somewhat more marginal place as that which provides a critical appraisal and, hopefully, transformation of traditional idealist exegetical methods. Both approaches to the Bible consciously assume gender as a lens through which to analyze and criticize naturalized power relationships and differences in hierarchy.

Feminist New Testament interpretation has numerous iterations, all taking women's experiences as a foundational impetus for understanding, revising, and transforming the exegetical task.[49] At its center are three interdependent components that connect such hermeneutics to broader non-idealist proposals for biblical studies. Related to the non-idealist impulse for contextual reading, feminist biblical interpretation has sought to remember women as historical subjects. This is accomplished by insisting not only that women are part of the texture of the biblical text itself, but also part of any social context in which the production of a text is embedded. Putting women back into history, however, is only a piece of this reflective maneuver; "complicating" the picture with the presence of women in the past and present makes it necessary for biblical interpreters to ask difficult but obvious questions about the application of androcentrically produced and supported ancient texts to modern situations where women's authority and agency are at stake.

Using women's experience as a resource for biblical scholarship and teaching reveals, as with another general principle of non-idealist approaches, the reality that ideas do not fall out of the theological sky but are created and supported by people who enjoy specific social and economic positioning. Authors, texts, and readers are always socially located; for feminist interpretation, this has meant a critical appraisal of the reality that biblical texts and interpretations have been overwhelmingly filtered through men and others aligned with patriarchal interests as authors, readers, and interpreters.[50] Through doing so, a main contribution of feminist interpretation is exposure of the unquestionable androcentricism of biblical texts and the situatedness of all interpreters and interpretations. Likewise, according to certain strands of feminist interpretation, economic and social structures that make possible the production of texts also are recognized as hierarchical creations that promote and naturalize the subordination of women to men.[51]

Feminist New Testament scholarship has historically been concerned with recovering, as much as is possible, women's voices in the texts, as well as positioning women as readers and interpreters with agency. This complex of concerns has been directly influenced by contemporary questions regarding women's placement in church and society, such as whether or not they should be ordained and what kind of authority the Bible legitimates. These specific questions fit into larger discourses promoting women's liberation. In this sense, as in non-idealist approaches, the first

and third tasks are co-dependent. The re-discovery of an original "women-church" or "discipleship of equals"[52] betrayed by the New Testament that can be useful for the emancipation of women today has at times led to an impasse: is the New Testament liberating for women or not?[53] While some New Testament passages are thought to be recoverable as useful to the contemporary project of women's emancipation (Galatians 3:28 comes to mind),[54] others are dismissed as impossible to reconcile with the project of feminist-oriented liberation.[55] How do we negotiate the passages that seem to be anti-woman—is it enough to emphasize the androcentricism of the context in which they were produced as a way to deal with such texts? The question of how women's voices can be recovered without re-inscribing and affirming traditional patriarchal historical-critical approaches is a major area of contention in feminist New Testament studies. For some, insofar as biblical interpretation has been associated with male privilege veiled as objectivity or value-neutrality, women would do well to turn away and find alternate paths.[56]

A major contribution of feminist New Testament interpretation is the assertion that patriarchal power relationships are not natural or created by God. Patriarchy is historically located and situated and therefore can be overcome in favor of different structures and social arrangements.[57] Even if this is a lasting achievement, it also should be clear that gender constructs that constitute patriarchy are not natural or given, or even the same across time and space. Such variability points to a major hermeneutical debate connected to questions in gender theory common to both feminist and queer biblical interpretation: that between essentialism and social construction. Are the categories and identities called women and men to be taken for granted, or do social and economic structures help create them?[58] What is the correlation between sex (believed to be tied to biology) and gender (the making of sex into a natural category and social position)? Should we limit our interpretive task to women alone or to instances in the New Testament where women appear or are explicitly named? It would make a difference to broaden gender analysis to focus on the gendered texture of texts and ideology as a whole.

Like feminist readings, "queer" approaches to the Bible also enter conversations about the social construction of gender roles and categories. Such modes of reading have originated partially out of necessity as a way for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT)-identified people to negotiate inquiries and anxieties concerning sexual orientation and participation in social institutions (including churches and marriage). Contemporary public debates about sexual orientation are engaged rather simplistically at crucial moments by uncritical appeals to the Bible.[59] Biblical scholars are thought to provide definitive solutions to questions about LGBT inclusion by demonstrating, for example, whether Paul was pro- or anti-gay, or whether the biblical witness condones homosexual activity. In a best-case scenario, Bible readings that inform such debates are limited to the nominal passages that have historically been read as having to do with same-sex activity or homosexual individuals (e.g., Lev 18:22, Rom 1:18-32, 1 Cor 6:9).[60] Interpreters have been forced into a conversation concerning homosexuality and the Bible on terms that have already been determined—namely, how can homosexuality be acceptable in a predominantly heterosexual

world? Acceptance or rejection of homosexuality is a priority. As a result, the dominant heterosexual imaginary is not overcome.[61]

In such debates, homosexual and heterosexual are taken for granted as essential, ahistorical, and static identities within individuals and across cultures. But queer, rather than solely a descriptive term, a stand-in for "homosexual," or abbreviated way to say "lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender," is a challenge to the heterosexual/homosexual hierarchy promoted as natural but in fact is elaborately built into economic and social structures in different historical and social contexts. Being and acting queer necessitates structural analysis and a shift in focus from how to deal with *what is* to how to imagine *what is possible*. Queer signifies a stance against comfort and against the ordinary order of the world. When confronted with the question of whether or not homosexuals are acceptable, a queer position does not automatically engage it, but asks why acceptability is the only, or best, option available. Queer hermeneutics moves from simple answers and prescriptions to complex questions and considerations. The interest in exposing the privileged character of the sexual binary, as well as the ability to imagine a different future, cements queer positionality as a non-idealist orientation.

Informed both by materialist, feminist, and gay liberationist struggles and by selected postmodern theoretical orientations, queer theoretical investigation aims to disrupt seemingly fixed paradigms of sexual orientation and gender formation.[62] Its proponents interrogate what counts as normal or natural sexual roles and identities in a given historical and social context. At its best, queer theory insists that sexuality is political and not separate from the complexities of social life.[63] To "queer" a text is to locate spaces where the so-called normative bodily narratives—monogamy, the heterosexual nuclear family, manly men, and feminine women—are destabilized. As ancient historian David Halperin notes, what should be challenging about queer theory is its capacity to "surprise and startle," to make how the world operates visible so we can imagine where to go from here.[64]

I claim the non-idealist orientation of queer theory as that which can be employed as a tool, as part of a gender-critical re-imagination, to confront and interrupt dominant political rhetoric that is expressed using gendered and sexual imagery. This requires moving beyond simple presentation of gender and sexuality as categories for analysis or positing the expression or existence of homosexuality in antiquity as a reason to (dis)regard the New Testament as authoritative for contemporary public decision making on matters sexual. Categorically, becoming queer encourages movement from center to margins, from high to low, from already to not-yet, from self to other. It seeks to subvert dominant normal categories and transform them in the service of building a different world, an-other world. For non-idealist purposes as outlined in this project, queer subjectivity is at the core of the biblical message of liberation; leaving the ordinary slavery-perpetuating structures of the world behind in pursuit of the "promised land" is most certainly an anti-patriarchal, unnatural movement.

Such subversive impulses are not yet fully integrated into queer New Testament studies, because queer interpreters are still, understandably, responding to the

pro-gay/anti-gay debates, especially in light of increased visibility of LGBT people and recent movements for gay marriage in the United States.[65] However, there are crucial implications for further analysis in the recent work of Halvor Moxnes on Jesus that integrates spatial and queer theories.[66] Overcoming the (irrelevant) question of Jesus' personal sexual orientation or that of his followers, Moxnes positions Jesus' queerness as exemplary dislocation from dominant institutional social order and categories (such as the household) and not as a theory that he had sex with other men. In this sense a queer reading is more thoroughgoing and promising than examination of selected passages or citing prooftexts for debates over the legitimacy of homosexuality; queerness is an expression of that which challenges the projected normalcy of the world. The Kingdom of God is a re-imagined, queer space properly stationed as a not-yet-place that transforms dominant social and cultural configurations.

Feminist and queer biblical interpretation have evolved into multifaceted methodological tools for addressing biblical texts and contexts from the margins in the service of liberation.[67] In both cases, however, Paul has been considered a major obstacle to true emancipatory re-readings of the New Testament due to his perceived insurmountable hatred of women and gay people, as well as his overall domineering masculine self-presentation and expectation of his communities. This is at least partly due to the reality that famous and enduring prooftexts for misogyny and homophobia are in Paul's letters. While I would not argue that Paul is perfect or even a feminist or gay man himself, I submit that characterizations of Paul as excessively dominating and irretrievably harmful suffer from a lack of complexity. Ancient Paul is not simply for or against contemporary women and LGBT people. As is the case with empire-critical and postcolonial interpretation, conflation of what is perceived to be *in* the text with the prejudices that have been *mapped onto it* in its "captured" form throughout time,[68] primarily by those who seek to maintain privilege, has prevented a thorough re-evaluation and re-imagination of Paul from feminist, gender-critical, and/or queer perspectives.

In a non-idealist framework, the discipline of biblical exegesis is responsible not only for participating in the exclusion and oppression of large groups of people, but also for hiding the basic radicalness of the Bible itself. A gender-critical re-imagination of Paul as apostle to the defeated nations seeks to emphasize such radicalism. To do so, I rely on several threads of critical evaluation stemming from feminist and queer theory and hermeneutics. Central is the articulation that gender and sexuality are not about what an individual essentially has or is, but about how one behaves in relation to others within a larger framework that is expressive of power and privilege. In other words, gender and sexuality are useful optics for seeing more adequately the hierarchical relations of power operative in the Roman Empire of Paul's time—and how his correspondence is situated in that context. It is precisely the possibility that Paul unhinges the naturalness and inevitability of the Roman Empire that is important to this project. The apostle to the defeated nations attempts such unhinging through imagining a counter-discourse to the

gender expression central to the creation of imperial power. Likewise, repositioning the nations at the margins of Roman rule makes Paul's call for solidarity between Jews and Gentiles look entirely different, even transformative, when gender and sexuality are better recognized as speaking for and about hierarchical difference and structural domination.

Summary and Outlook

Each of the methodological perspectives I have outlined above has several components in common. First, the New Testament (and the Bible as a whole) is shaped by the culture in which its texts were written and also by its history of interpretation and the cultures that have read and used it throughout time. Second, all biblical interpretation is situated and comes from a socially and historically located perspective; a primary step in interpretation is to be suspicious of readings that declare themselves neutral. Third, histories of dominated and marginalized peoples should matter to the discipline of New Testament studies. It is painfully and unavoidably true that the New Testament has been appropriated, domesticated, and used as a weapon by those who have had power throughout time. Students of the New Testament and early Christianity must continue to come to terms with that reality; we must never forget it. However, this reality renders an imperative for progressive and radical re-readings. Even as the New Testament is a document of massive cultural influence, it is also a document of resistance to imperial domination. It makes a difference to understand, through attention to the intersectional dynamics of Roman imperial ideology, that Paul in particular is concerned with the core issue of social transformation.

The theoretical perspectives discussed above also share undertheorization concerning interconnection and interdependency between issues of marginalization, as well as how such marginalization is expressed using gendered and sexual imagery in an imperial context. New Testament scholars of many interpretive stripes, including those dyed with liberationist hues, have been blind to the possibility that the image of Britannia, a defeated nation, pinned under Claudius, is in any way linked to the Gentiles to whom Paul is sent. But since her likeness is part of the social fabric into which Paul threaded his letters, it is also imperative to explore such a link in the service of re-reading and re-engaging Paul's texts.

Cursory examination of the image of Claudius conquering Britannia reveals that no single form of interpretation outlined above is adequate enough to properly "read" her position. If we (can) read for gender alone, we see a female body violently situated under a male body. If for queerness, we see both a female body in forced hierarchical relationship to maleness, as well as an unruly Amazonian type of gender transgression held in check by the forces of male power and, perhaps, an anxiety about penetration. If we think about empire and religion, we see a divine emperor "sacrificing" and taming an inferior woman's body; we also see this relief as part of an imperial cult complex, where provincials would go to worship. And if

postcolonial analysis is brought to bear on this relief, perhaps we see a representative of the central colonizing power defeating a colonized borderland, forcing her into "civilization."

Each of these perspectives demonstrates a different aspect of this same image, revealing its complexity. However, none of the relationships suggested by Claudius and Britannia's proximity to one another is intelligible without attention to the other facets. The significance of the New Testament's nations, then, cannot be simply that they are theologically not Jewish. The relief of Britannia and Claudius, and therefore the representation of the nations, shows them as lying at the intersection of gender and sexuality, religion and politics, and ethnicity and colonization. I submit that there is not a way to successfully separate out these factors within the material reality of Paul's context. A gender-critical re-imagination hopes to explore this intersection as creatively, as imaginatively, as possible. Below I outline some tools that will assist in the reconceptualization of Paul and the nations that I propose.

Re-Imagining Paul and the Nations

Reconsideration of the Roman imperial context of the New Testament writings reveals a complexity to the concept of Gentiles as representing nations conquered by and assimilated into Roman territorial and cosmic rule. Multiple primary sources attest to this political reality. However, the power differential between Romans and other nations is perhaps most clearly expressed in Roman imperial visual representation, which employs gendered imagery, notably personifications of conquered nations as women's racially specific bodies, sometimes in poses of deference toward Roman emperors or soldiers. A gender-critical re-imagination requires a realignment of the primary materials available to us concerning the world in which Paul lived and wrote as well as tools for a re-interpretation of these materials as counter-impressions of one another. Interdisciplinary work is not always methodologically obvious; in this section, I provide a wide-angle view of some helpful concepts to situate this project further.

Ideology, Imaginary, Imagination, Re-Imagination

As each of the interpretive perspectives I have outlined indicates, I am primarily interested in departing from traditional New Testament exegesis. One of the problems with proposing alternatives, as a non-idealist orientation makes visible, is that idealist New Testament interpretation creates, maintains, and affirms particular patterns of seeing texts and the world. A gender-critical re-imagination seeks to disrupt such patterns by strongly repositioning a reading of Roman imperial ideology as central to conducting Pauline studies.

The designation *ideology* is vital for understanding the structure of Paul's context. Ideology, according to Louis Althusser's well-known formulation, is "the

imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."[69] For Althusser, imaginary does not necessarily mean pretend. The *imaginary* designates what is created out of the presentation of knowledge as inevitable and universal. It is a relentless display of reality as unmediated and neutral and renders such reality invisible to criticism. Marginalized peoples know the imaginary only all too well: it is the "way it is and always has been"; that is, it is a world just fine as it is,[70] a world that does not welcome voices in the wilderness. Within the landscape of the imaginary, it is sufficient to just tweak, alter, and add; a wholesale transformation is neither desirable nor possible. Yet the imaginary is also seductive to the marginalized. Continuous co-optation of the borders and historically dominated in the name of celebrating diversity is promoted as dominant culture's concept of social justice, causing fractious debates within marginalized communities themselves.[71] Insofar as the imaginary suppresses transformative impulses, it is not emancipatory.

An important aspect of the imaginary as crucial to ideology, as far as can be applied in both ancient and contemporary contexts, is the discouragement and suppression of counter-voices through the threat of, and actual, violence. This is certainly the case in the Roman example, as I assert throughout this project. However, counter-voices and counter-practices can be detected speaking out of what can be called *imagination*. Imagination serves as a powerful tool, when coming from the marginalized, not only to confront the imaginary as deceptive, dominant, and harmful, but also to identify voices that have been repressed and articulate new discourses and ways of being that overcome its power.[72] In other words, through the identification of imagination, the imaginary is revealed as false, perhaps as pretend indeed. Imagination arises from a position of hope among the disenfranchised; it is the ability to envision a different world when that task seems overwhelming, implausible, and forbidden. Imagination is, in a sense, an often-coded revenge of the margins and the borders; it is often only vaguely familiar or intelligible to the imaginary while at the same time shattering its totalizing grip. I contend that, when examined in light of Roman imperial ideology, Paul's mission to the nations emerges not as a direct parallel, or even as an oppositional rhetoric, but as a counter-hegemonic discourse exemplary of imagination.

Yet *imaginary* and *imagination* occupy a double context: I use imaginary to designate the naturalness inherent in Roman imperial ideology, and imagination for Paul's response. However, I am not unaware that the term imaginary could also designate the contemporary context, including the ideology of idealist interpretive constructs characteristic of biblical studies and imagination, a non-ideal hermeneutical response from the margins. The role of imagination from the margins as a response to what is promoted as natural (read: exegetically proper) in biblical studies "urges the development and use of new methods of biblical interpretation" by questioning and seeing a different future "through transformative imagination as a counter-hegemonic subversive practice."[73]

In a gender-critical re-imagination, one major step of subversion and development of new methods is an in-gathering of primary sources and fields of study, usually

considered unimaginable or irrelevant to Pauline studies. This is necessary in order to show the subversive imagination of Paul's letters in their Roman imperial ideological context. It requires (ad)ventures outside the traditional idealist discipline of New Testament studies toward the theoretical perspectives I have reviewed. It also means a (re-)engagement with disciplines working on various aspects of Paul's context: ancient history, art history, archaeology, and classical studies.[74]

Imagination is a critical subversive practice; *re-imagination* is involved in the process of re-alignment, recontextualization, and re-reading. Re-imagination seeks to re-install Paul in his place as exhibiting critical subversive practice in his Roman imperial ideological context. I endeavor to re-read Paul among the nations as the subject of marginalized consciousness and imagination; I re-imagine Paul as a comrade, and not commander, of those at the borders and on the bottom. Critical re-imagination, then, promotes an alternative image of Paul. To do this, re-imagination as methodological process also posits a different relationship with non-textual sources. Visual representation in particular constitutes a primary, and not secondary, site where meaning is made and mapped. Re-imagination means to replace the image as central to Paul's imagination. Hopefully, through such a process, we are able to see the nations come to life.

Mapping Roman Imperial Ideology

I allege that the nations in Pompey's theater who come to life and surround Nero, as well as the nations like Britannia underneath Claudius in the Sebasteion relief, are among those to whom Paul claims he is sent as apostle. I also take the gendered expression of imperial power relationships seriously and imagine Paul as commenting on such power structures. By doing so I place Paul and images of the nations defeated by Rome in the same symbolic space, together on a map toward meaning-making. Such placement necessarily involves taking the structure that produced the representative images of the nations seriously as well as seeing the images themselves as reflective of Roman imperial ideology.

While images are reflective of ideology, they also construct it and participate in its dissemination. Roman imperial visual representation constitutes a mode of communication, or a semantic system[75] essential to expressing ideology to as wide an audience as possible, elite and non-elite. Roman imperial visual representation, rather than consisting of numerous individual objects that are unintelligible, exhibits a consistency of themes and elements that indicate a language of its own.[76] Images play a large role in cementing the imaginary quality of reality that for the Romans had much to do with the reinforcement of perception concerning state achievements. More than an illustration of a text, images provide a window onto culture and power relationships; they also render such relationships, and the institutions that keep them going, natural. Key categories useful to understanding

social structure and hierarchy are rendered effortlessly yet complexly through visual culture.

Using the relief of Claudius and Britannia as an example, several significant and opposing concepts emerge, the analysis of which will assist in mapping Roman imperial ideology more transparently. Some of these already were mentioned: self and other, male and female, active and passive, high and low, conqueror and conquered, order and threat, law and lawlessness, civilization and barbarism, city and country, colonizer and colonized, Greek and Amazon, Roman and nation, god and land, cosmos and chaos. As Claudius is defined by his relationship to Britannia and vice versa, none of these concepts can take on meaning independent of a relationship to one another. And each of these oppositions operates in a wider framework, where they help to define "the way it is." The relief itself might be a portrait of an emperor vanquishing a barbarian people represented as a woman, but structurally the relationship between Claudius and Britannia also communicates more than that. Roman imperial ideology, through images like this one as well as texts, represents these relationships at once as inevitable, natural, and universal. The task of a gender-critical re-imagination, by reading such images and Paul together, is to analyze such representation and locate Paul's imaginative responses.

Semiotics, or analysis of systems of signs, is a tool that assists in understanding such representation. Semiotic analysis begins with the assumption that language, or what enables representation, consists of interlocking patterns of signs. The value of signs depends on their relations to other signs within the system; a sign has no value independent of its context or semantic field.[77] A sign has two parts: that which it is and that which it is not.[78] In other words, according to structuralist semiotics, signs are given meaning by what they are not; meaning is relational, and mostly differential.

Language, however, is not an innocent product of reality; it constructs reality. The task of non-idealist semiotic analysis is to show how ideology works and is maintained as natural through an understanding that reality is not unmediated or objective, but is composed of interlocking patterns of signs and codes that make meaning in specific historical and cultural contexts. Semiotic analysis is, then, ideological analysis, as "whenever a sign is present, ideology is present."[79] Representation and reality construction occur at sites of (class) struggle, where those who gain control of the codes gain control of ideology. Therefore, certain signs and codes contribute to reproducing specifically bourgeois ideology, making it seem universal and natural.[80] Semiotics also recognizes a fuller range of systems of signification than just words. The overall task of semiotics is to determine how, and in whose interests, reality is constructed, precisely so it can be denaturalized through the location of contradictions, inconsistencies, and gaps that form the basis of social change. For the New Testament, the construction of reality under consideration is the Roman Empire, the ideology of which is easily accessible through its public art.

As discussed above, Claudius and Britannia represent several significant differential categories through their visually represented relationship to one another, reveal-

ing a language of oppositions structuring the reality of the Roman imperial context of the relief. Such oppositions can be mapped using a semiotic diagram, developed by Algirdas Greimas, by arranging them in differential relationship to one another:[81]

Figure 2. Semiotic Diagram: Structural Oppositions Constructing Reality. This Semiotic diagram maps power relationships as hierarchy. The A and B positions signify the dominant position. A and B, however, define and are defined by non-A and non-B, which represent not only the "opposite" of A and B but also a subordinate position. Spatially, Claudius overwhelming Britannia is a succinct expression of hierarchical relationships.

Here elements common to this image and the "table of oppositions" originally developed by Aristotle (quoting Pythagoras)[82] are mapped to show tensions. Following Brigitte Kahl, I alter the Greimasean diagram by turning it on its side. This maneuver affords a clearer picture of the hierarchical dimensions of the oppositions constructing ideology, rather than representing them neutrally as side-by-side.[83] Male, for example, is in a hierarchical relationship to female even as male cannot be understood apart from female. The signs in the A and B positions represent the top of a power structure, the values; non-A and non-B represent the bottom anti-values.

Through this mapping of Roman imperial ideology, we can readily identify the nations as semantically associated with the non-A and non-B anti-values of other, female, passive, low, conquered, threat, lawlessness, barbarism, country, colonized, land, and chaos. The Romans, personified by Claudius, are associated with the A and B values of self, male, active, high, conqueror, order, law, civilization, city, colonizer, god, and cosmos. The interlocking systems of signification, then, reveal a construction of reality created and maintained by the Roman imperial house and elite to protect privilege and power at the expense of the multivalent nations who are defeated. This is the structure in which Paul also works.[84]

For a gender-critical re-imagination of Paul, texts and images are not just read alongside each other, but emerge as counter-impressions of one another. Images may speak at times in a louder and clearer voice concerning dominant ideology than do texts, and may more obviously suggest points of resistance. I submit

that this is certainly the case with the nations (see chapter 2). Working with Roman imperial visual representation as a semantic system reveals gender constructs as essential to the deep structure of Roman imperial ideology. A Roman imperial ideology of divinely ordained conquest and rule without end over all the nations is coded using gendered signifiers, exemplified by the Claudius and Britannia relief briefly discussed here. The manliness of the Romans overcomes the perceived (and often exaggerated) femaleness of foreigners. This is shown most graphically by the visual evidence: the Romans personified the nations using female bodies in public viewing contexts, thus solidifying a hierarchical differentiation central to constructing the reality of their domination as natural, inevitable, and universal.

Re-Mapping the Nations in Paul's Letters

A main point of this study is to recontextualize, in a non-idealist way, the Gentiles and nations and position them as occupying the same semantic field as the poor and marginalized. Such a shift re-imagines Paul as an apostle to the marginalized through his mission to the defeated, linking Paul's mission to the nations with the preferential option for the poor and marginalized at the core of the Bible. This requires attention to the whole of his historical and social context, including visual and literary representation from those in charge, the Romans. Therefore, in light of such attention, an expanded and re-imagined grammar of the nations is in order.

Paul's use of *ethnē*[85] is always in the plural, save for one instance where he quotes Deut 32:21 (Rom 10:19) referring to the "not-nation" and (the nation of) Israel.[86] This indicates that he does not conceive of Gentile as a designation for a singular person (a Gentile person, for example). Paul's use of the term for Gentiles can be viewed, therefore, not so much as a marker of individual but collective identity. Paul refers to himself multiple times as the apostle to the nations.[87] In several instances Paul's letters,[88] when mentioning the nations, are interested in a relationship to Jews.[89] He also uses the term relative to *peritomē*, "circumcision" (e.g., Gal 2:8, 9).[90] The term *peritomē* is used alongside *akrobustia*, "foreskin" (usually translated: "uncircumcised"). Paul's use of *peritomē* and *ethnē* as oppositions places nations and uncircumcised in the same semantic position.[91] This does indicate a semantic opposition between Israel and nations, but it is also important to locate Paul's discussion of this term in its immediate literary context and ask the question of what he does with such opposition.

Paul employs these oppositions as a part of his discourse on reconciliation. His use of nations, circumcision, and foreskin is highly concentrated in his rhetoric concerning "justification by faith" in Galatians and Romans. These are places where Paul builds his case that the Gentiles and the Jews are *both* justified, and therefore must relate to one another differently as part of "one body."[92] The term *ethnē* appears frequently in Romans 9–11 (the "tree-grafting" of Jews and nations)[93]

and 14–15 (the "weak and strong" sharing at table),[94] both main passages explicitly concerned with an integrative relationship between Jews and other nations that overcomes, not reinforces, the dichotomy and hierarchy implied in Jews/Gentiles. In Romans 4, Paul locates both circumcision and foreskin in the same genealogical position by making Abraham the father of both groups. Putting Jews and nations in the same space, by having them eat in the same place, is also a preoccupation of Paul's in Galatians 2 and Romans 15.[95] Peter's fear of the "circumcision faction" and his subsequent withdrawal from the "table of nations" is what Paul says is his reason for "opposing him to his face" in Antioch, according to Gal 2:11. Jews and Gentiles, then, appear to be oppositions within which Paul operates and with which Paul struggles to build different relationships.

James Scott has identified the "Table of Nations" tradition of Genesis 10 as a motivator in Paul's use of the term in his letters, particularly Galatians.[96] According to this tradition, all of the nations of the earth were descended from Noah after the flood. They blanket the whole world and can trace their origins back to a common father, further back even than Noah to the creator God of Israel. The world according to Jewish conceptualization, therefore, is composed of all of the nations who share a common ancestry. Scott indicates that Paul references this Jewish historical and geographical tradition to justify his travels to the specific peoples to whom he wrote.[97] However, it is not clear that "sacred geography" is the only impetus for Paul's mission. Even if that is the case, however, geography is not politically neutral. Paul's possible use of Jewish geographical constructs must be positioned in light of the dominant, Roman geographical imaginary of his context.[98]

Paul genealogically links "all of the nations" to Abraham. This means Israel *and* Gentiles. Abraham is presented as the father of Jews and other nations, circumcised and uncircumcised, since he himself "trusted" (*pisteuō*) God before he received the covenant of circumcision (Rom 4, Gal 3:8–9). In other words, according to Paul's rhetoric, Abraham was identified both with the foreskin (nations) and circumcision (Jews), making him the father of both groups. In Galatians, Paul draws on the Genesis tradition that "all the nations" will be blessed in Abraham (Gal 3:8). His fatherhood of the one promised "seed" (*sperma*) is activated in Christ; through trusting Christ, "all" (the nations) are "sons of God" (Gal 3:26), the "seed of Abraham," and "heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:29; see also the transformation from slaves to sons to heirs in 4:1–7). In Paul's imagination as it relates to his Jewish framework, all of the nations are (re-)connected through common descent from the God of Israel.[99]

It is the case that one of Paul's reference points for his use of *ethnē* must be his Jewish context, exemplified by "his scripture" and other Jewish texts available to us. Scott has provided extensive cataloging and analysis of the use of *ethnos, ethnē* in the LXX and other Hellenistic Jewish literature. I do not endeavor to duplicate that work, even if sustained reconsideration of Paul's Roman imperial context leads to a different conclusion about how Paul interacts with that material. Similarly, Paul's Jewish identity and scriptural context has been well established, and I assume

Paul operates fully in reference to that identity and context. I seek to broaden the semantic field available to Pauline significations. Therefore, how Paul's Jewishness signifies in light of Roman imperial ideology is a specific concern of this project.

While all of the nations, including Israel, might belong to the same human family in Paul's Jewish framework, in this study I entertain the notion that Paul relates to a different framework as well. The Romans also have a tradition of locating all of the nations in space and time through visual and literary representation.[100] The theme of "original relatedness" is not the case in the Roman imperial ideology of Paul's time.[101] The fate of all of the nations, according to the Roman imaginary, is to be ferreted out and found, conquered, and incorporated into the Roman family through military violence and diplomacy, as well as subsequent enslavement and death. Such is the divine mandate of the master nation chosen by Jupiter and given "empire without end, without limits on space or time" (Virgil, *Aen*. 1.279). Rome, the chosen nation, celebrated chosenness through violence against others. In this sense, Rome constitutes a nation herself, though designated as the "nation of the toga" and the nation endowed with "civilization" and a mandate to supply order and peace to the chaotic outsiders at the borders.

In Roman foundation myths and stories, geographical and historical texts, accounts of events such as triumphal processions, and visual representation, other nations are foreign to Rome and threatening, and must be defeated and displayed as such. Cataloging and defeating foreign nations builds up Rome's power as universal dominators and slaveholders. The great men of the genealogy of Roman rule, from the gods to the father Augustus as displayed in his Forum, have in common achievements like military victory over non-Romans. In the Roman imperial framework, all of the nations are linked to the *pater patriae* through conquest and capture, not creation and brotherhood. The nations who blanket the earth, in this schema, belong to Rome and should be subjugated to a god who is also a human state ruler. Therefore, the nations have political, geographical, gendered, and racial dimensions to their semantic field. They cannot be defined without attention to power relationships. Such a recontextualization needs to inform Paul's self-presentation and view of the nations.

A re-imagined grammar of the nations especially notices that the difference in hierarchy between Romans and nations is communicated in gendered terms; the semantic field of *ethnē* e[qnh, then, is necessarily also about constructions of gender and power. The Romans in the early principate conceived of relations of power as "power over," in excessively masculine terms,[102] and this is evident in constructions of the Roman male body: he is to be always a penetrative sexual partner, literally or figuratively. A "real man" is not to be penetrated in any way.[103] Any hint of penetrability rendered the body "un-male," or female, and thus on the "bottom." Yet this conception extends far beyond the individual body to Roman corporate, national ideology. Femaleness—foreignness—is always to be conquered by force or to be complicit in the impenetrability of imperial maleness.

Romans' stories about themselves and their conquered world in the imperial period, in conversation with visual representation, reveal that the hierarchical dichotomy and opposition to examine in Paul's letters, particularly Galatians, should shift from Jews/Gentiles to Romans/nations. The Jews belong to the underside of a Romans/nations hierarchy as one of many defeated and incorporated peoples, and Paul's self-presentation and mission as outlined in his letters should be seen in that light. I use these chapters to provide examples for positioning the Romans/nations difference in hierarchy as a primary ideological constellation at the center of a reconceptualization of Paul's self-presentation and mission to the nations.

The Romans/nations hierarchy is a power differential expressed through gender constructs and has a sexual connotation: conquest is rendered as male penetration of femaleness (women's bodies and land) on a grand, international scale. This is especially apparent in visual representation, where victorious Romans are personified by a single male body in relationship to a nation personified by a female body, but the literary examples are clear enough as well. Roman imperial conquest "was a brutal affair, and, like later Western imperialism, probably produced a similar reservoir of phallic oppression on the frontiers, where 'women became conquests' and 'conquests became women.'"[104] Likewise, in literary representation, gender and sexual constructs played a rather large role in how Roman imperial ideology communicated the idea of what it meant to be Roman, and what it meant to belong to the empire/fatherland and its leader, who was imaged as father and god at the same time.

A re-imagined grammar of the nations through inclusion of sources usually dismissed as ornamental to New Testament studies reveals the term as politically charged and symbolic of conquest and defeat. The nations lie at a complex intersection of gender, race, sexuality, nationality, geography, military power, and economic structures. As a signifier, they occupy a site of struggle.