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Ancient Israel and Settler Colonialism

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Abstract

This essay looks at ancient Israel as a settler colonial society. After an introductory paragraph that describes the significance of the study of ancient Israel for the study of settler colonialism, it summarises various approaches to the study of the history of ancient Israel. It then presents evidence for seeing the Israelite documents and early history in settler colonial terms. Finally, it looks at some aspects of decolonisation of the biblical narrative based on acknowledging at least the very possibility of a settler colonial nature of early Israel.

Ancient Israel and the Study of Settler Colonialism

The story of ancient Israel as described in the bible has exerted tremendous influence on the world. As described in the biblical books Genesis-2 Kings,¹ this story starts from the creation of the world, then proceeds to the calling of Abraham as an individual ancestor of ancient Israel, and then portrays his immediate descendants who are described as migrating to Egypt. In the course of time, the Israelites are being discriminated against by the Egyptians and then subjected to slavery. However, deliverance comes under the leadership of Moses who has experienced a call by Yahweh, the god of the Israelites, and the Israelites then escape Egypt with the help of Yahweh who sends natural disasters on the Egyptians as a sign that they should let the Israelites depart. After escaping Egypt, the Israelites make a covenant with Yahweh at Mount Sinai, and after an initial failure with entering the land, a second generation succeeds and the land is conquered under the leadership of Joshua and the Israelites settle in it. The later history of Israel then consists of relating the vicissitudes of the Israelite community, first through a unification into a kingdom by David and his son Solomon, and then division of the kingdom into the northern kingdom of Israel and the Southern kingdom of Judah. The two kingdoms are themselves conquered by external powers, first the north by Assyria in the 8th century BCE, and then the South by the Babylonian empire in the beginning of the 6th century BCE. After an exile of some 70 years, a return is allowed for Jews from Babylonia, and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe some of the events that pertain to the returnees in the postexilic period.

This story became a foundational story for the postexilic Jewish communities that carried the legacy of pre-exilic Israel, together with a number of other documents that were less historically oriented. Subsequently, a new offshoot sprang from ancient Judaism in the first century CE. The New Testament documents describe the beginnings of this offshoot, Christianity, together with a set of a set of instructional documents for the early Christian communities. The story of ancient Israel very much retained its role as a foundational story for the new Christian communities and was reinterpreted by Christianity and expanded to explicitly pertain to all nations and peoples. Christianity was at first a societal unknown and then a persecuted *religio*

illicita in the Roman empire to which it was initially largely confined, but nevertheless spread and became sufficiently influential by the third century to be first co-opted as an accepted religion and then set as an exclusive religion in the empire. After the fall of Rome, Christianity remained the religion of Europe and was largely confined to it. However, with the era of European explorations and colonisation from the late 15th century on, the whole world was essentially exposed to the religion of the Europeans. While the enlightenment and secularisation has weakened the hold of Christianity in Europe especially during the last couple of centuries, it, and thus the story of ancient Israel behind it, still remains an influence to be reckoned with in a number of respects. And, the effects of enlightenment in any case have not been equally experienced outside the West where Christianity is still increasing its scope in many areas.

It is typical of foundational narratives that they are identified with, retold, relived and readapted by succeeding generations of their recipients.² In this, while the biblical texts became canonised and essentially fixed by the close of the first few centuries of the Common Era, the texts themselves were subject to interpretation thereafter by countless theologians and laymen who sought to understand the meaning of the texts and to relate the texts to their situations as guidance for their lives, both individually and collectively. Identifying with the foundational documents of Christianity and Judaism as sacred, then, would generally mean giving authoritative status to related narratives in their various readapted forms, and it would be easy to consider such narratives as providing models for good practice, and this is how observant Christians and Jews have generally approached the matter.

However, it was sooner or later explicitly realised that the texts contained materials that were difficult to adapt as models of good practice. For example, the so-called imprecatory psalms in the Psalter showed how the relevant writers cried for vengeance against their enemies. Subsequently, intricate theories about how to deal with such psalms were constructed by those who recognised the accompanying ethical problems but wished to maintain the authoritative nature of the materials, or, alternatively, the problematic materials were, and still are, simply set aside.³ And yet, equally, many readers and interpreters of the bible did not, and still often do not, consider certain texts problematic when especially a later hindsight has shown that this should have been the case. Worse still, such readers and interpreters sought to recontextualise such texts in the furtherance of their political agendas. Arguably, some of the most problematic of these texts relate to conquest and genocide. In this, a nation or people group, or some of its individuals under threat or bent on conquest as in the era of European wars and colonisation could identify with the Israelite nation and its struggles against an external nation or group that stood in its way. Thus, as the Israelites defended, so could the later Christian or Jewish nation, and as the Israelites conquered, so could the later ones. Selected Old Testament⁴ texts were thus used to justify slavery,⁵ crusades, conquest and colonialism.⁶ In contrast, while the New Testament texts arguably have a political character, they reflect the origins of Christianity as a religion that largely spiritualised the meaning of Israel and did not initially align itself with political power. In other words, the New Testament in its original setting could scarcely account for a pan-societal vision of physical geographic conquest and domination, unless one may see some aspects of the book of Revelation, itself offering deep interpretational conundrums as the book is in a form of a series of first century visions, as promoting or foretelling violence that is divinely

induced. Thus, many Christians would identify with the ancient Israelite story without in essence considering its ostensibly changed role in the New Testament. And, while such problems as societal support for slavery and explicit colonialism are now much a thing of the past, such issues as neo-colonialism are still very much relevant. In this, that the USA is the main current world power with a sizable body of Christians who support, or at least acquiesce, to a particular political stance demonstrates the continuing strong relevance of the legacy of the bible.

A further complication in this respect is the birth of Zionism and the settlement of Jews in Palestine and establishment of the Jewish state there in the middle of the 20th century. While initially primarily a secular movement and with many of today's Jews being secular, it has also substantially looked back at the biblical promises of return of the Jewish people to the land of their forefathers after a break of some two thousand years. This movement is supported by certain segments of Western and American evangelical Christianity in particular, even if the support by such Christian individuals and communities is based on slightly different rationales. This process of continuing modern Israeli settlement is based on settler colonialism.⁷ Therefore, and considering the inherently violent character of settler colonialism, that this specific process strongly traces back to the bible and the biblical story of ancient Israel again implies that a continuing analysis of the biblical materials and their interpretation is highly pertinent.

Responding to the problematic issues that relate to the biblical texts and their legacy involves the decolonisation of the bible. In many ways, this has been done.⁸ However, there is one aspect of such decolonisation where further work is still required. This relates to the relationship of ancient Israel and the bible to settler colonialism. While the biblical texts demonstrably have been shown to have been used in support of violence, colonialism and settler colonialism by various communities, additional analysis on *why* these texts have proved so susceptible for such use is needed. It will be argued here that some of the texts have been used in support of settler colonialism because the texts are themselves a product of settler colonialism. More specifically, it will be argued that the material in Genesis-Joshua is defined by settler colonialism, reflecting a societal transformation in ancient Canaan at the end of the second millennium BCE that gave birth to ancient Israel. Considering the already disputed nature of the history of ancient Israel and the difficulty of decolonisation in settler colonial contexts, such a proposition is likely to prove controversial in itself. I will therefore start with an overview of the main approaches taken by interpreters to the history of ancient Israel. This will be followed by a section that examines how Genesis-Joshua can be seen to attest a settler colonial ideology. Having demonstrated at least a strong plausibility of a settler colonial character of ancient Israel and its documents, consideration will be made of decolonising these materials in the bible. As I will argue, regardless of the historical stance taken towards the biblical materials, current attempts at decolonisation ultimately trace back to disavowal and at least partial *de facto* denial of the settler colonial character of the ancient Israelite polity (or the possibility of such a character), issues that in themselves have been identified as problematic in the decolonisation of settler colonialism in the modern world.⁹ In this respect, then, one may further ask the question of what might be brought in place instead of such disavowal and *de facto* denial, and I will make some possible suggestions in conclusion to the essay.

The Debate about Ancient Israel

The history of Israel is hotly contested. The debate traces back to the time of the Enlightenment and to modern biblical criticism that can be traced to the 18th century. It was the French physician Jan Astruc who first identified differing sources in the book of Genesis in the 18th century,¹⁰ and in the course of the next century or so, the Pentateuch had been divided into four sources of J (a narrative source using the name Yahweh), E (a narrative source using Elohim), D (Deuteronomy) and P (a source consisting of priestly laws and narrative).¹¹ Importantly, these sources were seen as having originated in differing times, even when the exact extent and dating of the sources was debated. It was the German scholar Julius Wellhausen who suggested a new framework where the J and E sources were seen to originate in 9th-8th centuries BC, Deuteronomy in the seventh century and the Priestly source in the postexilic time (5th-4th centuries BCE).¹² Wellhausen also suggested that the religion of Israel developed from simple to complex, and free spirited to ritualistic, as attested by the sources. The Wellhausenian framework was subsequently adopted by the majority of Old Testament scholars, and by the 20th century, anyone who wished to be part of the academic guild in Old Testament studies in practice had to follow it. The model did however undergo a number of modifications, such as form criticism represented by Gunkel and Von Rad that suggested the existence of oral traditions behind the sources, and in the latter part of the 20th century the extent and date of the sources was subjected to criticism, with a number of differing theories proposed.¹³ Some have tried to more or less jettison the whole source critical approach, speaking for a literary unity of the Pentateuch.¹⁴ In the 21st century, an influential trend in source critical approaches to the Pentateuch seems to be a move towards an idea of redactional layers that have successively been added to an early form(s) of the work on the way towards its final completion, with the early form itself possibly consisting of various separate strands initially developing independently.¹⁵

As for the historical books Joshua-2 Kings, they were initially seen as incorporating the Pentateuchal sources, at the same time, Wellhausen and others with him considered Genesis-Joshua as forming a so-called Hexateuch.¹⁶ However, in the 1940s Martin Noth presented his famous theory of the Deuteronomistic History according to which a single historian in the Babylonian exile in the 6th century BCE wrote Deuteronomy-2 Kings based on sources available to him.¹⁷ The Deuteronomistic history was then later in the postexilic time incorporated into Genesis-Numbers to form a continuous narrative from the creation of the world to the Babylonian exile.¹⁸ Noth's theory gained very wide acceptance but was modified and then increasingly challenged towards the end of the 20th century, with the theory being considered as disputed today. Instead, a number of scholars have in essence returned to a concept of a Hexateuch.¹⁹

This summary of the history of the literary critical theories about the Pentateuch and historical books at the very least arguably shows that it is difficult to make definite conclusions about the provenance and composition of these materials based on a literary critical examination. Some further criteria are needed. Such criteria have been provided by archaeology.²⁰ The development of the archaeological discipline as it relates to the bible dates back to the latter part of the nineteenth century.²¹ At first, archaeology in the "Holy Land" was very much driven by the concerns of those interested in the bible, in trying to illuminate the bible based on archaeological

discoveries and verify the factual claims of the bible. However, as time went on, archaeology also became very much its own separate discipline, and at present, what may previously have been called biblical archaeology is now often labelled as Syro-Palestinian archaeology, a separate discipline which is largely independent from biblical studies.²² And yet, there is still very much interaction between archaeology and biblical studies. Many biblical scholars wish to understand the bible based on relevant archaeological discoveries, and a number of archaeologists also explicitly attempt to bring out how their discipline can contribute to biblical understanding.²³ Importantly, archaeology has had a special relationship with the early Israelite history in general. Once actual data from ancient Palestine started to accumulate in any substantial amounts, problems about how they might relate to the bible started to arise. While events from the period of the judges on were generally seen as reflecting actual history, events earlier than that became suspect from the beginning of the 20th century on. Thus, the book of Joshua stood at the borderline of where going back in time would rather make fact become fiction in the biblical storyline.²⁴ As part of this, the origins of early Israel became a matter of debate. The conquest model whose most notable proponents were William Albright and his disciple John Bright in the first half of the 20th century had argued for a general veracity of the biblical record, even though it had lowered the date of the conquest to the 13th century instead of the 15th century implied by the biblical chronology. This model was abandoned due to problems with matching the archaeological profile most notably of such sites as Ai (Josh 7-8), Jericho (Josh 2, 6), Gibeon (Josh 9) and Arad (Josh 12:14; Num 21:1-3). With the general abandonment of the conquest model, two other possible ways of seeing the process of the Israelite settlement arose. The peaceful infiltration model, with Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth its most notable proponents, suggested that the Israelites were nomads who immigrated to the land from outside. In this, importantly, the immigration was peaceful and did not involve a conquest. Secondly, the peasant's revolt model advocated by George Mendenhall and Norman Gottwald suggested that the Israelites were Canaanites who revolted against the existing socioeconomic structure and withdrew to the highlands to form a new society. Later scholarship has shown problems with all of these models. However, while the peasants revolt model was rejected, the idea of an indigenous origin of the early Israelites was retained. In other words, contemporary scholarship tends to think that Israel was a development indigenous to Canaan.²⁵ That said, for example, a carefully worked out recent archaeological study by Faust argues that at least a significant number of the early Israelites originated from outside the area, allowing even for the inclusion of a group that escaped Egypt, even if Faust does not subscribe to the idea of a conquest.²⁶

In addition to this set of overall approaches, very recently, some of the more radical scholars have questioned the veracity of the biblical accounts even from judges on. The most radical of these scholars argue that the biblical Israel is a scholarly construct from the Persian period.²⁷ In other words, according to this view, very little can really be known about pre-exilic Israel based on biblical documents, including for the portrayed time of the United Monarchy during David and Solomon. At the same time, there were those who would defend the historicity of the biblical materials from the time of Abraham on, even when they would consider Genesis 1-11 as "protohistory" where a link with any actual events is not clear.²⁸ In broad terms, then, we can divide the field into three camps of mainstream, minimalist and maximalist scholars.²⁹ It is no wonder then that a casual observer may sometimes be bewildered with the number of options available to them, also considering the debate about the literary critical

analysis of the biblical texts themselves, where the dating and granting of historical value of the related biblical documents based on literary analysis broadly follows the general approach to the history of each of the main approaches. In the following, I will outline how recourse to theoretical approaches that relate to conquests and settler colonialism can help illuminate the related biblical texts from a fresh angle and also suggest something about their historical plausibility. These considerations will then lead to a discussion of how it might be appropriate to read those texts today.

Ancient Israel as a Settler Colonial Society

To date, no previous work has been done in comparing the biblical materials with settler colonialism. This may be much due to the fact that many of the developments in settler colonialism are very recent, with the field still in a number of ways at an incipient, even though already fruitful stage.³⁰ Some work has been done with comparing the biblical materials with conquest theories and genocide studies in the ancient context, even though this too has been limited as a whole.³¹ Some of the reason for this has probably been the recent lack of credibility that has been given to the biblical texts in academic discussion. Another reason may be the ethically problematic nature of the texts in their present day contexts. This in itself has clearly been pointed out by a number of writers.³² However, typically the writers have actually not examined the ancient texts in their totality in their ancient context, or consider the ancient context as very much different from what the texts portray.³³ There can thus be a discrepancy between, as it were, many of the “ancient” and “modern” type of readings. In a sense, modern readers who have clearly identified problematic aspects in the biblical texts are asked to think that these arose in an for all practical purposes “accidental” way, with a number of elaborate theories constructed as to how this might have been.³⁴ My suspicions are that these relate to the concepts of “disavowal” and denial of history, themselves associated with settler colonialism in general,³⁵ and will explore them in the next section. In this section, I will instead suggest that it is easy to read these texts in such a way in the present day because they are the product of a settler colonial society (an ancient one at that) and reflect the ideological framework of settler colonialism, with violence and genocide typical accompaniments of settler colonial processes.

The biblical documents themselves indicate that the ancient Israelites originate from outside the land.³⁶ The biblical story indicates that Abraham, Israel’s forefather, migrated into the land of Canaan from Mesopotamia, but that his descendants subsequently migrated to Egypt to protect themselves from a famine. The Israelites ended up as slaves in Egypt, but were liberated and left Egypt under the leadership of Moses. They then traversed a wilderness and arrived at the edge of the land of Canaan where Moses dies, and it was left to his successor Joshua to lead the Israelites into the land of Canaan in order to conquer it and settle it. At the outset, this immediately sounds like settler colonialism. While the theory of colonialism often requires a supporting metropolis,³⁷ this by no means seems to be a must for settler colonialism. As Veracini suggests, “while settlers see themselves as founders of political orders, they also interpret their collective efforts in terms of an inherent sovereign claim that travels with them and is ultimately, if not immediately, autonomous from the colonising metropole”.³⁸ Besides, the existence of Semites in Egypt in the second millennium is an acknowledged fact,³⁹ and, at least in theory, some of the immigration to Canaan could have incorporated people identifying themselves as Semites who

were returning from Egypt outside a putative main migration reflected in the books of Exodus to Numbers by way of a stylised narrative.⁴⁰ In any case, after a certain time, reproduction in the settler collective would be sufficient to drive the settler colonial transformation.

As part of settlement process, other peoples than those coming from Egypt could also have joined the Israelites,⁴¹ whether indigenous or from outside the land, and these people would then have been transferred⁴² into the settler collective, whether initially as indigenous or exogenous others. Such people include Caleb the Kenizzite (Joshua 14:6), Rahab (Joshua 2, 6), the Gibeonites (Joshua 9) and individuals in 1 Chr 20:4-8; 1 Sam 27:8.⁴³ Interestingly, in all of these cases the transfer is based on collaboration between the indigenous or exogenous other(s) and the Israelite polity, and it is not entirely clear whether and to what extent the individuals in question were considered as full fledged members of the Israelite polity (e.g. Gibeonites as essentially enslaved temple servants; Josh 9:22-27).⁴⁴ At the same time, the biblical documents indicate more forceful ways of transfer. Transfer by killing⁴⁵ is indicated in e.g. Deuteronomy 7, and transfer by physical displacement e.g. in Exodus 23:20-30).⁴⁶ Depicting the indigenous peoples as decadent (E.g. Deut 7) can also be categorised as a narrative transfer,⁴⁷ and recourse to a previous sojourn in the land by the ancestors of Israel as another type of narrative transfer.⁴⁸ And, interestingly, some of the seven nations in the formulaic list (e.g. Dt 7, Joshua 9:1-2, etc) may have foreign origins,⁴⁹ if so, a transfer by denying their indigeneity may be involved.⁵⁰ The Israelites also legislate for a foreigner (*ger*) in a number of places in the Pentateuchal legal materials (see e.g. Lev. 17-25; Dt 14:1-21), and the concept of *ger* can easily be understood in terms of regulating exogenous others. Interestingly, a special law in Deuteronomy 23:1-7 specifies that an Edomite and Egyptian can be uplifted into the Israelite community in the third generation, but an Ammonite or Moabite should for ever be an abject other according to that law.⁵¹ In other words, the biblical documents indicate the existence of the tripartite division of the settler collective and indigenous and exogenous others and a number of possible transfers as happening in early Israel, and, interestingly, a kind of more traditional colonial type of approach to indigenous peoples seems to be indicated as having been taken by king Solomon later on in 1 Kings 9:20-21, even though one could possibly consider this as a kind of transfer, except into a “slave” class.⁵² Even a golden peaceful time is depicted in the biblical documents in the time of the early settlement (Josh 21:43-45).⁵³

The above examples suggest that the biblical texts that pertain to early Israel can be read in settler colonial terms. There are however reasons to see Genesis-Joshua in a wider sense as a whole legitimating Israel’s possession of the land and as setting up a new society there. David Day’s *Conquest: How Societies Overwhelm Others*⁵⁴ outlines an overall process that typically happens when a society (Day calls such a society supplanting society) takes over another, and this process can be tied with settler colonial theories and considerations.⁵⁵ According to Day, a “process of supplanting” by a society involves three stages: “Firstly, it must establish a legal or *de jure* claim to the land”.⁵⁶ Then, “a supplanting society must proceed to the next stage of the process by making a claim of effective or *de facto* proprietorship over the territory that it wants to have as its own”.⁵⁷ Such a claim “is commonly established by exploring the territory’s furthest reaches, naming its geographic and other features, fortifying its borders, tilling its soil, developing its resources, and, most importantly, peopling the invaded lands”.⁵⁸ Lastly, “the last and most elusive step of the

process...involves establishing a claim of moral proprietorship over the territory”.⁵⁹ For this to succeed, “such a claim must outweigh the claim that any other society, including the previous inhabitants, has the potential to assert”.⁶⁰ Again, at least at first sight, this seems to be happening in ancient Israel according to the biblical documents. In broad sweep, which we will be refining further below, for the Israelite society, the patriarchal promises reflect the first point, the conquest and settlement the second, and recourse to Yahwism as an exclusive ideology, together with the constitution of the new society (as in e.g. Deuteronomy and the Holiness Code in Leviticus⁶¹) and its contrast with the practices of the previous inhabitants (e.g. Deut 7) the moral claim. Day then goes further by identifying typical processes that accompany these three stages, commenting that these processes are often overlapping (as are the three main stages).⁶² These are, staking a legal claim, mapping the territory, claiming by naming, supplanting the savages, claiming by right of conquest, defending the conquered territory, using foundation stories, tilling the soil, recourse to genocide where appropriate and peopling the land. One may also add a final section, organising the supplanting society, to reflect on certain issues relating to the moral claim. I will illustrate these aspects below, with some slight modifications as some of the features can be seen as slightly overlapping for our purposes here.⁶³

Abraham’s travels in the land of Canaan and building of altars (e.g. Gen 12) can be seen as staking a legal claim. Interestingly, the place for the first recorded altar is Shechem, and the Israelites are later instructed to build an altar on mount Ebal in Deuteronomy 27, and the act of building, together with the accompanying ceremony prescribed by Deuteronomy 27:9-26, is described as having taken place in Joshua 8:30-35. This ceremony of conquest and supplanting by a new society harks back to the patriarchal promises in Genesis and also reinforces the interrelatedness of Genesis, Deuteronomy and Joshua, and arguably Pentateuch-Joshua as a whole.

In terms of mapping the land, we can see how Abraham traverses the land in Genesis (Genesis 12:6-9), also at Yahweh’s instigation (Genesis 13:17). This then can be seen as part of “knowing the land” and thus asserting a claim over it, even if the activity is rather incipient in the book of Genesis. However, in the books of Numbers and Joshua matters are blown out completely explicitly. According to Numbers 13:1, Yahweh commands Moses to send out men to explore the land of Canaan.⁶⁴ The men do this and bring back a description of the land, and we can see in the light of the above considerations how this can be seen as part of the process of laying claim to the land, in a way that humans would behave as part of such processes.⁶⁵ The book of Joshua then describes the successful conquest. Joshua 18:3-10 describes a mapping process as part of dividing the land to the Israelite tribes. This mapping process is part of Joshua 13-21 which in a larger sense describe the tribal allotments. These allotments could be entirely programmatic.⁶⁶ While such a programmatic vision could have arisen at any time in Israel’s history, based on comparative parallels from conquests in world history, the vision would fit particularly well in a period of early Israel when these territories are not yet (fully) in the control of the Israelites but are desired to be so, also keeping in mind that Joshua 13-21 (esp. Joshua 13:1-7) and other biblical documents (e.g. Judges 1) and archaeological evidence indicate that the Israelite settlement and control started from central, eastern and northern highlands and expanded out from there, to include lowlands in the later course of Israel’s history (cf. also Jdg 1).⁶⁷

In terms of claiming by naming, it appears that there are some occasions when the Israelites rename places according to the biblical documents, but these seem relatively few. This is the case with Gilgal (Joshua 14:15), Hill of Foreskins (Joshua 5:2-3), Valley of Achor (Joshua 7:26), Hebron (Joshua 14:15; 15:13; Judges 1:10), Debir (Joshua 15:15), Jerusalem (Judges 19:10), Bethel (Judges 1:23), Dan (Joshua 19:47; Judges 18:29), Havvoth Jair (Numbers 32:31) and Nobah (Numbers 32:42). By way of comparison and contrast, interestingly, in the explicitly religious sphere, the Israelites are commanded to erase even the name of the gods of the previous inhabitants (Deuteronomy 12:3). Instead, the name of Yahweh is to be established in the land, and in a “chosen place” in particular (Deuteronomy 12:4-31).

As regards foundation stories, clearly the bible indicates, in the book of Genesis in particular, that the land was promised to the patriarchs, and this theme runs through the whole of Pentateuch-Joshua one way or another (see e.g. Exodus 3:16-17; 4:5; Deuteronomy 1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 29:13; 30:20; cf. e.g. Numbers 13:2; Joshua 1:2, 12). The exodus and liberation provide another powerful foundation story, and the lawgiving at Sinai (Exodus) and in the wilderness (Leviticus-Numbers) and at the edge of the promised land (Deuteronomy) add further strands to the set of foundation stories. The genealogies (see especially Genesis 10) serve to establish Israel’s place among the nations, in the context of creation and the land Israel now occupies, and the patriarchal stories define Israel’s relations with its close neighbours (e.g. the Edomites, Genesis 26-27, 32-33).

As for supplanting the savages and the genocidal imperative, the idea of the lower worth of the inhabitants is already grounded in Genesis 9:25 where Canaan is cursed. As already discussed above, such texts as Deut 7 indicates that the inhabitants of Canaan are to be obliterated, and this settler colonial transfer corresponds to a genocidal imperative.

According to the biblical documents, lands would also belong to the Israelites by right of conquest, as with king Sihon,⁶⁸ or apparently even by virtue of treading on them.⁶⁹ Ancient battles already provided legitimation for Jacob according to Genesis 48:22.

As regards tilling the soil and peopling the land, with early Israel, we can see how the population explosion, as it has been called,⁷⁰ in the highlands would fit perfectly well with expansion out from there in the ensuing centuries. In general, settler colonial processes may include periods of apparently peaceful coexistence, and then extensions of the process that may include further fighting, and may also include transfers by assimilating, or attempts to assimilate indigenous peoples.⁷¹ In terms of fit with the biblical documents, while the Israelite narrative in the book of Joshua can be read to emphasise aspects of war and sudden conquest, it does also indicate a continuing settlement process that took a lot of time. Conversely, the narrative of Judges does emphasise the gradual settlement and coexistence aspect, without however denying that there was also violence (e.g. Judges 1).

As for fortifying the territory, with early Israel, there seems to be a relative lack of mention of fortifications and fortifying in Pentateuch-Joshua. But Numbers 32 does indicate that the Israelites fortified and possessed fortified towns in Transjordan, and Deuteronomy 3:5 suggests fortified towns with “many” unfortified villages in Transjordan, which would also fit with the large number of unfortified settlements in

Cisjordanian highlands in IA I. It would appear that the Israelites would have taken over fortified towns where they existed and where they could conquer them (cf. Josh 10:20; 14:12; 1 Sam 6:18, 20:6, 15). David and Solomon and later kings are described as taking over fortified towns or fortifying themselves (e.g. 2 Samuel 5:6-10; 1 Kings 9:15; 1 Ki 12:25).

Finally, the legal materials in Genesis-Joshua can be seen as providing a blueprint for the new Israelite society, even when it is not certain how much this was a theoretical rather than a practical construct.⁷² We may here observe the following quote by Wolfe, also as a summary to our considerations above: “settler colonialism has, as observed, two principal aspects – not only the removal of native society, but also its concomitant replacement with settler institutions. This latter, positive aspect involves the establishment and legitimation of civil hegemony”.⁷³ And, “eliminary strategies all reflect the centrality of the land, which is not merely the component of settler society but its basic precondition”,⁷⁴ and the centrality of the land surely also applies to the positive aspect(s). In sum, based on these considerations, the overall ancient Israelite strategy and message attested in Pentateuch-Joshua is very compatible with a settler colonial transformation in ancient Canaan at the end of second millennium BCE.⁷⁵ The broad sweep of the archaeological data can also be seen to support such a conclusion. We may further add that, even if there is no immediate clarity about some of the specific archaeological details, even if, for example, the conquest of Ai, a particularly problematic event to verify archaeologically, could be seen as not having taken place,⁷⁶ this would not take away the possibility of battles in other places as such would quite naturally be expected in settler colonial situations in itself.⁷⁷ In other words, a full match between text and artefact is not necessary to suggest the settler colonial nature of early Israel.

In conclusion to this section, we may add that the biblical texts suggest that ancient Israel is not the only place at the time (at least broadly speaking) that may have undergone a settler colonial transformation. Deuteronomy 2:20-23 (cf. also Amos 9:7) suggests that the Ammonites settled in place of the Rephaites/Zamzummites, the Edomites destroyed the Horites and that the Caphtorites destroyed the Avvites.⁷⁸ Little evidence appears to be available about the first two processes, but the Caphtorites are generally identified with the Philistines who are known to have come to the southwestern area of the Levant from outside.⁷⁹ While many details about them are still unknown despite extensive study,⁸⁰ one may suspect that settler colonialism can be applied to them as a phenomenon also.⁸¹ Whatever the case, at least some of these phenomena would seem to fit to a time when the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean “world system” collapsed,⁸² and in any case we do know from world history that there have been people movements, conquests and settlements throughout.⁸³

Decolonising Ancient Israel and Its Legacy

The above considerations have suggested that there are good reasons to suspect that the early history of ancient Israel was defined by settler colonialism. This fits with a broad interpretation of the archaeological evidence, the Israelite documents that portray its early history, at the very least the overall thrust of those documents, and settler colonial theory in the context of known world history.⁸⁴ Such an understanding has a number of implications for biblical scholarship and for reading the biblical texts

today. As regards biblical scholarship, in terms of their interpretation of the history of ancient Israel, these results are largely in line with maximalist interpretations of the biblical evidence in terms of early Israelite history.⁸⁵ In this, they are at variance with mainstream and minimalist interpretations. For this reason, it may be that they will encounter opposition from proponents of these two interpretative groups. As is known from studies of the sociology of science,⁸⁶ and this may be tied with the support of political parties and cultural inertia, once established, certain types of interpretations tend to become entrenched and can only be changed with difficulty, often only through generational shifts.⁸⁷ A recognition of the (at the very least potential) settler colonial character of early Israel would suggest that the biblical documents are more reliable than is often thought, and, in terms of potentially reconstructable history, this would also suggest a closer proximity to the documents, or at least their sources to real events than for example current literary critical theories that have been in vogue since the 19th century might grant.⁸⁸ Therefore, at least initially, a settler colonial interpretation of the evidence may be a minority view among the current interpretative traditions of biblical scholars.

And yet, there is also a profound potential difficulty in terms of reception of a settler colonial interpretation among maximalists. They typically, even though not necessarily exclusively, consist of practicing Christians or Jews who have a personal attachment to the divine claims of the texts and of God's action in history. One may go as far as to say that the reliability of the texts is held sacrosanct. For such people, acknowledging the settler colonial character of the texts⁸⁹ and the related history of the ancient Israelites with its accompanying violent character may be traumatic, even when this is not the only area in the Old Testament scriptures that has been acknowledged to cause problems, as already indicated above. Here we come to the concept of disavowal so typical of settler colonial situations.⁹⁰ Just as most notably present day USA, Australia and Israel find it extremely difficult to acknowledge their settler colonial foundations and continuing settler colonial character, similarly, for these types of Christians and Jews, recognising the settler colonial character of ancient Israel and its foundational documents may strike to the core of their self understanding, even if the related psychological dissonances undoubtedly also have diverging characteristics, as for example, the settler colonial situation of ancient Israel is long passé as an existing state of affairs with the ancient texts instead acting purely as a (powerful) foundation story. The relevant texts are in essence simply ignored when reading the bible.⁹¹ There are however other alternatives in such Christian discourse that perhaps tend to be more popular with theologians rather than the general Christian public. These in essence see the ancient context as detached from the present one, and therefore the texts become more palatable.⁹² The situation with these approaches is at least on the face of it paradoxical in terms of an acceptance of the claims of the texts.

As for those belonging to the mainstream interpretative tradition, many of them also have religious beliefs. However, for them, the ancient Israelite documents that portray a conquest do not portray actual reality, but somehow, perhaps through mythical means, acquired a character that espouses violence.⁹³ The texts do not need to be seen as historical, one just needs to make sure that they also are not used to legitimate violence in the present. Thus, the texts are tamed and domesticated. However, this approach does strike as ultimately denying the violent, and here settler colonial character of the texts and the history of ancient Israel. It does resemble the approaches

of present settler colonial states in denying their settler colonial character in more active means.⁹⁴ Nothing “bad” actually happened, it is only the texts that are somehow perchance problematic. This resembles a “screen memory” in settler colonial theory.⁹⁵ As Veracini comments in the settler colonial context, “Narratives of settler colonisation emphasising notions of *peaceful* settlement (i.e. the vanishing Indian trope in the United States, the Canadian myth of essentially non-violent dealings, representations of Australia as the “quiet” continent), however, often resemble another Freudian form, screen memory: an inaccurate reconstruction that obscures what really happened”.⁹⁶ Along these lines, we may perhaps add the vanishing Canaanite in the biblical texts and their reading. Theories of both peaceful immigration and indigenous origins of the Israelites belong to this category. Of these, the latter is a more radical version of a denial of the settler colonial character: Obviously, if there were no external origins for the Israelites, there could be no settler colonialism, just a peaceful expansion of the existing inhabitants to the highlands and transformation of the society through a new ideology of Yahwism and then (somehow) a creation of a national myth of a conquest.

This latest interpretation is most characteristic of so-called minimalist readings of the bible, even though not limited to them. Some of these are motivated by a political stance, for example, the title of Keith Whitelam’s *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* already reveals an underlying contemporary political agenda.⁹⁷ In this case, the goal is to decolonise the bible in order to speak for the plight of the Palestinians in the occupied territories, in itself a pressing agenda considering the settler colonial character of modern Israel.⁹⁸ The claims of Zionists are fought against by in effect offering an alternative narrative of the history of the peoples in order to delegitimise Zionist narratives. However, the problem with such a narrative(s) is that it nevertheless is a kind of disavowal and denial of the settler colonial character of ancient Israel.⁹⁹

The above considerations show a variety of approaches that have been taken towards the biblical texts of settler colonial nature. If then, settler colonial studies ask the question of how settler colonial societies and narratives are to be decolonised, we might ask the same about the bible. Again, while some excellent work has been done on the topic of decolonising the bible,¹⁰⁰ the attitudes towards the early history of Israel still typically rely more on disavowal than acknowledging the full extent of the problematic character of the early history of Israel and its documents, and this can be understood in terms of our considerations above. Maximalist approaches will generally not want to tackle the violent character of the texts at all, and mainstream and minimalist approaches at least in effect deny the settler colonial character of early Israel.

Also keeping in mind our comments in the Introductory section, it would seem that a road to full decolonisation starts from a full acknowledgement of the past. Christians and Jews, and people at large should acknowledge the settler colonial and therefore inherently violent character of the texts. As a whole, a sociological approach to the Israelite society should help here. It was an ancient society, just like any other. Just like societies can form through conquest and settler colonialism, so could the Israelite one. Just like a society can defend its territory, wage wars and undergo sociological and political transformations, so could the Israelite one. Just like a society could be conquered and (at least parts of it) go into exile and diaspora, so could the Israelite

one. Just like societies produce literature with differing viewpoints, so could the ancient Israelite one, with both a “bright” and “dark” side of humanity coming through such texts. An important characteristic in all this was that a particular religious framework was instrumental in shaping the Israelite society, and yet, even this was not unique, as all other contemporary ancient societies considered religion as a vital overarching factor. In this, while one may argue that Yahwism was important for the Israelite society, at least the seeds of monotheism already existed in the time of Akhenaten in the second millennium in ancient Egypt. What is unique about ancient Israel is the reception history of its documents and their impact on the world. The documents survived the destructions of the Babylonian exile, the Roman destructions in 70 AD and some two thousand years of diaspora of the Jewish people.¹⁰¹ The documents also served as a set of foundational documents for a new movement within ancient Judaism that then became a new religion which in due course found popular support in the Roman empire. The empire initially tried to suppress this religion, but eventually co-opted it and soon thereafter made it the only acceptable religion in the empire in the fourth century AD. With this development, in many ways, the fate of this new religion, Christianity, became tied with the politics of the empire and the legacies the empire that due to the rise of Islam and other political movements over centuries became largely confined to Europe. However, with the start of European explorations and European colonialism, this new religion spread with the conquerors, whether implicitly or explicitly within the new colonial structures and endeavours.¹⁰² For many of the colonists, Christianity and conquest went hand in hand, and many saw the Israelite conquest tradition as a paradigm to which one could make recourse, however explicit or implicit such recourse may have been. It is likely that the conquests were also very much driven by factors that did not directly concern religion, but how can one ultimately separate these two spheres in a Christendom setting where religion was tightly intertwined with the structures of the state. With decolonisation, the destructive role that the Christian religion had on indigenous peoples has been increasingly acknowledged. Undoubtedly the enlightenment and the rise of biblical criticism did help with easing the often oppressive hold that religion had on European societies. That religion could be subjected to criticism would then also have helped in lifting its oppressive role on non-European societies and thus have contributed towards decolonisation, at least potentially so. And yet, paradoxically, biblical criticism, with its denial of the historicity of the settler colonial violent character of early Israel, has not yet helped recognise the full extent of the problematic nature of the biblical documents. Disavowal and denial of historicity are still an issue. In this, while explicit Western colonialism is at an end, neo-colonialism which undoubtedly has more of a financial edge to it, still reigns. And yet, politically, with the United States as the most powerful country on earth today, the arguably double settler colonial foundations of its dominant religious heritage and the actual conquest and settlement of the North American continent ensure that the legacy of settler colonialism proper very much lives on in world history. In addition, in the Middle East, the USA supports another society with a double settler colonial foundation. The Zionists often, even if not exclusively, legitimate their hold in the land of Israel based on a historical claim.¹⁰³ In order to decolonise this claim, the problematic nature of settler colonialism should be acknowledged in its double dimensions. Such an acknowledgement includes the international, but particularly strong in the USA, body of Christian Zionists who sincerely hope for the fulfilment of the kingdom of God on earth but cannot or do not want to see that this particular version of its expectation and support involves a disregard for the needs of a group or

groups of human beings just like themselves, and worse still, support of or acquiescence to violence and genocide. An alternative narrative, such as seeing the future of Israel in essentially non-political terms,¹⁰⁴ could acknowledge these problems, and, also in a wider sense find a way to create societies and a world system that is based on the rights of all, not just one particular interest group with power as clearly is the case with settler colonialism. Reader response criticism of the bible that acknowledges the problematic aspects of this collection of texts is required,¹⁰⁵ in association with a historical understanding of the development of the Christian and Jewish religions over the past millennia. For Christians, perhaps this would best suggest a return to a form of Christianity that looks back to its first centuries of existence for inspiration, where religion is not tied with institutions of power and with beliefs in one's superiority.¹⁰⁶ For Jews, it should mean relinquishing a desire of or acquiescence to repeating a violent process and ideology that once shaped them into a people whose legacy they now carry, and this should be particularly apt in a post-Holocaust context.

Concluding comments

I have tried to move through some of the interpretative conundrums of the biblical materials in the context of the history of scholarship and current academic positions. I have suggested that an understanding of early Israel as a settler colonial society with the documents portraying its history reflecting that state of affairs provides an essentially simple and straightforward interpretation of the available evidence that also aligns extremely well with how the texts have been used to support violence and settler colonialism in their afterlife in world history. I have also noted that such an interpretation may prove controversial as a number of vested interpretations and understandings of various academic, political and religious communities are at stake. However, it is my conviction that bringing such an interpretation forward into analysis and discussion is vital in order to understand the history of humankind better and to decolonise the bible, and with it the outlook and potential actions of communities who still look to these texts as in some way inspirational or authoritative for their life and practice. In this, in a wider context, we now live in a pluralistic world where a variety of opinions and societal currents are acknowledged, at least ostensibly so in Western countries. Decision-making is generally done in a democratic manner. And yet, we can see based on postcolonial analysis that the human desire to control others lives on, whether in politics, in academics or at an individual level. Even in a democratic system, if the majority is for a violent or in general unjust solution to a problem, as can easily be the case especially in terms of those that are seen as not belonging to the polity,¹⁰⁷ this cannot be deemed satisfactory. Considering this, a study of settler colonialism should also lead to activism, and such activism should encompass those with a religious commitment or heritage. In this way, the study of settler colonialism can arguably make a fruitful contribution to the development of humanity also in relation to the religious dimension. Concomitantly, it is not the denial and disavowal of history and the legacy that religion has bequeathed as part of it, but their acknowledgement and reinterpretation that is likely to be most beneficial. Within this and also in a wider encompass, the study of religion is politically significant, as are the results and applications of its study as a human phenomenon that has significance for every sphere of human life even now.

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- ¹ This story has a parallel in the books of Chronicles. In the books of Chronicles, the story however does not start from creation, but from the beginnings of the Israelite monarchy.
- ² Cf. e.g. Richard Waswo, *From Virgil to Vietnam: The Founding Legend of Western Civilization* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1997)
- ³ See e.g. Eryl Davies, the *Immoral Bible: Approaches to Biblical Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2010); Robert P. Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheepfold: The Bible as Problematic for Theology*, 2nd edn (London: SCM Press, 1997).
- ⁴ I will use the term Old Testament here, those preferring the word Hebrew Bible may substitute with it in the presentation.
- ⁵ Keeping in mind that the ancient Israelite legal materials actively allowed slavery (see e.g. Ex 21:2-11, 20-27; Lev 21:42-46; Deut 15:12-18) and Paul in the New Testament, writing in the context of the Graeco-Roman society, did not at least actively discourage it (1 Tim 6:1-2; Philem.).
- ⁶ See e.g. Waswo, *Founding Legend*; John Docker, *The Origins of Violence: Religion, History and Genocide* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), esp. 113-129; Michael Prior, *Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).
- ⁷ See e.g. Lorenzo Veracini, *Israel and Settler Society* (London: Pluto Press, 2006)
- ⁸ See esp. Mark G. Brett, *Decolonizing God: The Bible in the Tides of Empire* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2008).
- ⁹ See Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 104-108 for this problematic.
- ¹⁰ See e.g. Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament Vol 1: The Pentateuch* (London: SPCK, 2003), 162-163.
- ¹¹ P itself was divided into P “proper” and H, the so-called Holiness Code, broadly consisting of Lev 17-26.
- ¹² Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israel*, sechste Ausgabe. (Berlin: Druck und Verlag Georg Reimer, 1905). First published 1878, English translation *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1885). English translation also available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/4732>; Cf. e.g. Gordon J. Wenham, ‘Pondering the Pentateuch: The Search for a New Paradigm’, in D.W. Baker and B.T. Arnold, ed., *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books), pp. 116-144 and idem, ‘Pentateuchal Studies Today’, *Themelios* 22.1 (October 1996): 3-13, also available at http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_pentateuch_wenham.html.
- ¹³ See e.g. Wenham, ‘Pentateuchal Studies Today’.
- ¹⁴ See e.g. R.N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study*. JSOTSS 53 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).
- ¹⁵ See e.g. the summary table in Eckart Otto, *Deuteronomium 1,1-4,43*, HTKAT (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 2012), 256; Erich Zenger and Christian Frevel, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 8th edn (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer), 67-231. Note in passing that one problem of biblical (notably including Pentateuchal) criticism is that there is a limited number of texts studied by a large number of people over the course of a couple of centuries up till now. While there are differences between texts (see e.g. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd edn, Revised and Expanded [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012]) and one can think of possible modifications to an initial work based on comparative empirical study of ancient Near Eastern documents (see esp. Jeffrey Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* [Wauconda, Ill: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2002, a reprint of 1982 edition published by Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press]; David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction*, [New York: OUP, 2011]) and the biblical materials themselves suggest that they have utilised sources (see e.g. Josh 10:12-13; 1 Kings 11:41), the biblical textual and ancient Near Eastern evidence do not really empirically support most of the source and redaction critical theories. Arguably we have a problem here that is in some ways similar to the problem with modern string theory (See Lee Smolin, *The Trouble With Physics: The Rise of String Theory, The Fall of a Science, and What Comes Next* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006]; cf. Barton Zwiebach, *A First Course in String Theory*, 2nd edn [Cambridge: CUP, 2009], 3-12). There is a felt need to produce new theories in order to advance the field, but there are many theories that can be constructed that can fit current empirical evidence. In biblical studies there are probably an infinite, or at least a large number of permutations that can be achieved by modifying source and redaction critical theories, and it is comparatively easy to produce a new research paper, book or dissertation by making a new permutation. However, as with current string theory, one cannot verify the resulting theories against empirical evidence (more theories are possible if one includes theories that do not match evidence

fully) and thus the faith of the academic community (or subcommunity) that the approach is an appropriate one is the main force in driving further research within the adopted theoretical framework (Proponents of string theory do tend to explicitly acknowledge at the outset the problem with empirical verification, see Zwiebach, *A First Course in String Theory*, 9-11, biblical scholars do not [i.e. *mutantis mutantis*], save for the relatively rare exception). So the conundrum for biblical studies would be that if certain types of theories are discontinued, what would the academics do, as perhaps for Physics in that if string theories were not to be pursued any more, what would physicists do? (Cf. the Kuhnian concept of a *research* paradigm; see Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962; 50th anniversary edn/4th edn 2012], esp. 23-51.) More seriously, and more in line with our considerations below, ultimately these exercises in biblical source and redaction criticism are in a number of ways a fairly esoteric in the wider societal context in terms of their impact (cf. the comments in David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* [Oxford: OUP, 2005], 293-295), however, they, even if probably in many ways inadvertently so, do contribute towards maintaining an overall mainstream approach to the history of Israel that has implications for decolonising the bible, as will be discussed below.

¹⁶ See Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments*, 3rd edn (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1899; 1st edn 1876/77); Gerhard von Rad, 'The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch', in *idem.*, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and other Essays* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver Boyd, 1965; German original in BWANT 4th series, vol XXVI, 1938), 1-78.

¹⁷ Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 2nd edn, JSOTSS 15 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991; German original: *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien I*, Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1943).

¹⁸ As already mentioned above, the books of Chronicles broadly provide a parallel account for the time from early monarchy to the exile and provide a subject for study on their own. These books themselves clearly suggest that they were written in the postexilic time, even though themselves claiming to utilise sources that date back to an earlier time.

¹⁹ E.g. Otto, *Deuteronomium 1,1-4,43*; Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, and this author.

²⁰ Following section based on Pitkänen, *Joshua*, AOTC 6 (Leicester: IVP, 2010).

²¹ See e.g. P.R.S. Moorey, *A Century of Biblical Archaeology* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1991).

²² Note also that textual artefacts unearthed by archaeology are of importance for biblical studies. Such textual artefacts from countries surrounding ancient Israel reveal that these surrounding countries shared a number of cultural features (and sometimes there was direct interaction between these peoples) with ancient Israel and the texts (and sometimes non-literary artefacts) can thus be used to illuminate the ancient Israelite customs in a comparative sense. The archaeological discipline in this respect branched into the fields of ancient Near Eastern studies of Assyriology, Egyptology, Hittitology, etc., now essentially completely independent, even if cognate, fields on their own.

²³ See e.g. Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology and the Land of the Bible 10000-586 BCE*, The Anchor Bible Library (New York: Doubleday, 1992); Thomas E. Levy, ed., *Historical Biblical Archaeology and the Future: The New Pragmatism* (London: Equinox, 2010).

²⁴ See e.g. J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 2nd revised edn (London: SCM Press, 2006) for an interpretation of the history of Israel as a whole from such a perspective.

²⁵ See e.g. William G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come from?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

²⁶ See Avraham Faust, Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis: Settlement, Interaction, Expansion and Resistance* (London: Equinox, 2006), esp. 170-187.

²⁷ See e.g. Niels Peter Lemche, *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (London: SPCK / Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998); Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992); Philip R. Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'*, JSOTSS 148 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); Mario Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel* (London, Equinox, 2005; Italian original 2003).

²⁸ See e.g. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Tx: Word Books, 1987); *idem.*, *Genesis 16-50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX.: Word Books, 1994); Kenneth Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Eerdmans, 2003); Iain Provan, V. Philips Long and Tremper Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

²⁹ There is of course individual variation between each scholar even within each interpretative tradition. One might go as far as to say that there are as many opinions as there are academics, which would seem an apt description of Humanities in general.

³⁰ See Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 1-15 for a summary of past research.

- ³¹ Pitkänen, *Joshua* is a recent example of such work.
- ³² See e.g. Waswo, *Founding Legend*; Docker, *Origins of Violence*; Carroll, *Wolf in the Sheepfold*; Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Davies, *Immoral Bible*.
- ³³ See below for further details on this.
- ³⁴ See e.g. Douglas S. Earl, *Reading Joshua as Christian Scripture*. Doctoral thesis, Durham University, 2008, available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2267/>. Also published in slightly revised form as *Reading Joshua as Christian Scripture*, Journal of Theological Interpretation Supplement 2, (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2010) for an elaborate construction of a “mythical” provenance of the related concepts in Joshua.
- ³⁵ See Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 102-108.
- ³⁶ Veracini suggests that peoples originating outside the land(s) they occupy tend to see their existence in historical terms, whereas indigenous peoples see themselves in ontological terms (personal communication, 2013).
- ³⁷ Note the definitions in Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Princeton, N.J., Markus Wiener, 2005; original German edition 1995 by C.H. Beck, Munich; translated by Shelley Frisch, with a foreword by R.L. Tignor and an updated bibliography), “A *colony* is a new political organization created by invasion (conquest and/or settlement colonization) but built on pre-colonial conditions. Its alien rulers are in sustained dependence on a geographically remote “mother country” or imperial centre, which claims exclusive rights of possession of the colony.” (p. 10) and “*Colonialism* is a relationship of domination between an indigenous (or forcibly imported) majority and minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonized population, the colonizers are convinced of their own superiority and their ordained mandate to rule.” (pp. 16-17).
- ³⁸ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 53
- ³⁹ See e.g. Kitchen, *On the Reliability*, 318-319, 333-334.
- ⁴⁰ It should be noted that there is no direct evidence for an exodus as described in the book of Exodus, and the matter is hotly contested, for positive considerations, see esp. James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); idem., *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); for negative ones, see e.g. Liverani, *Israel's History*, 277-282.
- ⁴¹ But note also the mixed multitude (*‘erev rav*) that went out of Egypt in the Exodus according to Ex 12:38.
- ⁴² Veracini, *Settler Colonialism* defines transfer essentially as “cleansing” the settler body polity of its (indigenous and exogenous) alterities (p. 33). As Veracini suggests, “a successful settler society is managing the orderly and progressive emptying of the indigenous and exogenous others segments of the population economy and has permanently separated from the abject others” (*ibid.*, p. 28; abject others are those permanently excluded from the settler polity and have lost their indigenous or exogenous status, pp. 27-28). Veracini then goes on to define 26 different forms of transfer (*ibid.*, pp. 35-50), and it should be noted that killing, deportation etc. constitute only a subset of the possible transfers, there are other strategies that are more subtle, such as assimilation. Note also that indigenous others (really original people of the land where settlement is taking place) are normally considered as a threat to the settler collective as their continuing existence constitutes a threat and challenge to the very existence and legitimacy of the settler collective (*ibid.*, pp. 24-26, 33-34), whereas exogenous others (these might include people from lands external to the settler collective who might join the collective) are generally seen as people who can collaborate with the settler collective (*ibid.*, pp. 26-27).
- ⁴³ The last two noted by John F. Brug, ‘Where Did the Name “Philistines” Come From?’, paper presented at ASOR Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, 2010, pp. 5-6.
- ⁴⁴ Cf. these with charts in Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 25-29. In any case, taking these people in seems closely connected by Veracini’s transfer by assimilation (Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 37-39).
- ⁴⁵ Necropolitical transfer in Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 35.
- ⁴⁶ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 35 classifies this as an ethnic transfer.
- ⁴⁷ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 41 (Narrative transfer I).
- ⁴⁸ This seems close to Narrative transfer IV in Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 42-43, even though there also seem to be differences.
- ⁴⁹ See Pitkänen, *Joshua*, 210-211 for a summary.
- ⁵⁰ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 35-36 calls this a transfer by conceptual displacement.

⁵¹ Cf. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 26-28 for the concepts in settler colonial terms. Note however that there is a debate as to what extent ancient Near Eastern law is to be taken as theoretical or as practical, for example, no court cases referring back to legal codes exist in the ancient Near East from around the time in question (see e.g. Raymond Westbrook, 'Introduction: The Character of Ancient Near Eastern Law', in idem., ed., *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), 1-90 (esp. 18-19).

⁵² But this seems essentially similar to the treatment of the Gibeonites as indicated above, at least in some respects.

⁵³ Cf. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 88-89.

⁵⁴ David Day, *Conquest: How Societies Overwhelm Others* (Oxford: OUP, 2008).

⁵⁵ The two are not exactly the same, as a society can supplant through "internal colonisation" which can be different from settler colonialism (Day 2008, p. 6).

⁵⁶ Day, *Conquest*, p. 7.

⁵⁷ Day, *Conquest*, p. 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ The Holiness Code is generally considered a stylistically separate unit within the Pentateuch, largely consisting of Leviticus 17-26.

⁶² Day, *Conquest*, 7-9.

⁶³ I will divide into: staking a legal claim, mapping the land, naming, foundation stories, supplanting the savages and the genocidal imperative, by right of conquest, tilling the soil and peopling the land, defending the territory. What follows below is a summary, full details are available in Pitkänen, *Pentateuch-Joshua: A Settler-Colonial Document of a Supplanting Society*, under consideration of a journal.

⁶⁴ The Hebrew root *tur* in 13:1 has also the meaning "to spy".

⁶⁵ Cf. also R.J.A. Talbert, ed., *Ancient Perspectives: Maps and their Place in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

⁶⁶ Cf. e.g. Pitkänen, *Joshua*: 261-264, quoting G. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, SBL Writings from the Ancient World 7, ed. Harry A. Hoffner, Jr (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996; 2nd edn, 1999), pp. 109-111, for an example of Hittite border descriptions (in a treaty context).

⁶⁷ See e.g. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis*, esp. pp. 159-166, 221-226; Israel Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1988), pp. 324-330; Eero Junkkaala, *Three Conquests of Canaan: A Comparative Study of Two Egyptian Military Campaigns and Joshua 10-12 in the Light of Recent Archaeological Evidence* (Turku: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2006; PDF version available for download from <https://oa.doria.fi/handle/10024/4162>), esp. 308-309.

⁶⁸ See also Day, *Conquest*, pp. 96-97, referring to the defeat of king Sihon, and making a parallel with later conquistadors.

⁶⁹ Day, *Conquest*, p. 96; see e.g. Joshua 1:3; 14:9.

⁷⁰ See W.G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?*, 98.

⁷¹ Cf. Carroll P. Kakel, *The American West and the Nazi East: A Comparative and Interpretive Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Cf. also e.g. David L. Preston, *The Texture of Contact: European and Indian Settler Communities on the Frontiers of Iroquoia, 1667-1783* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 1-22.

⁷² Cf. our comments above about the practicality of ancient Near Eastern materials.

⁷³ Patrick Wolfe, 'Structure and Event: Settler Colonialism, Time and the Question of Genocide', in A.D. Moses, ed., *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (Oxford/New York: Bergahn Books, 2008), 102-132 (130n71).

⁷⁴ Wolfe, 'Structure and Event', 103.

⁷⁵ In any case, we *do* know that the ancient Canaanite societies as attested in the Amarna letters in the Late Bronze Age *are* transformed into Israelite societies in the ensuing centuries, even if one takes a minimalist approach into the history of Israel.

⁷⁶ For considerations of Ai and other "problematic" places, see e.g. Pitkänen, *Joshua* (pp. 182-184 for Ai specifically). Note on the other hand that, for example, there is clear archaeological evidence of a destruction at Hazor at the time (Josh 11:10-12; see e.g. Pitkänen, *Joshua*, 232).

⁷⁷ Note also that e.g. Joshua 11:13 indicates that the Israelites did not burn many of the conquered towns, and if so, it would not be easy (if even possible) to find archaeological evidence of destruction at the relevant sites.

⁷⁸ For some further examples of people movements in the ancient Near East in the 2nd millennium BCE based on extrabiblical sources, see Kitchen, *On the Reliability*, 254. For a recent work dedicated to colonization in general in the ancient Near East, see Maria Eugenia Aubet, *Commerce and Colonization in the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013; Spanish original 2007).

⁷⁹ See esp. Trude Dothan and Moshe Dothan, *People of the Sea: The Search for the Philistines* (New York: Macmillan, 1992); Assaf Yasur Landau, *The Philistines and Aegean Migration at the End of the Late Bronze Age* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010).

⁸⁰ See e.g. Yasur-Landau, *The Philistines and Aegean Migration*; Aren M. Maeir, L.A. Hitchcock and L.K. Horwitz, 'On The Constitution and Transformation Of Philistine Identity', *OJA* 32.1 (2013), 1–38.

⁸¹ See Pitkänen, 'Ancient Israel and Philistia: Settler Colonialism and Ethnocultural Interaction', under consideration of a journal.

⁸² On this "system" and its collapse, see e.g. Itamar Singer, *The Calm Before the Storm: Selected Writings of Itamar Singer on the End of the Late Bronze Age in Anatolia and the Levant*, WAW Supplements 1 (Atlanta: SBL, 2011); Eric Cline, *Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea: International Trade and the Late Bronze Age Aegean* (Oakville, CT: David Brown Book Co, 2009).

⁸³ Cf. e.g. Day, *Conquest*.

⁸⁴ In particular, keeping in mind the principle of Occam's razor, that the documents have been read as supporting settler colonialism fits perfectly with the idea that they themselves were produced by settler colonialism.

⁸⁵ Such as e.g. Kitchen, *On the Reliability*.

⁸⁶ See Kuhn, *Structure*; Paul K. Feyerabend, *Against Method*, 3rd edition (London: Verso, 1993; 4th edition in 2010).

⁸⁷ Cf. Kuhn, *Structure*; Feyerabend, *Against Method*.

⁸⁸ It is not possible to really get into the debate on dating biblical documents here. However, for a literary critical examination that enables a closer proximity to the events, see Pitkänen, *Central Sanctuary and Centralization of Worship in Ancient Israel: from the Settlement to the Building of Solomon's Temple*, 2nd Gorgias Press Edition (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press; first edition 2003). See also the considerations in Pitkänen, *Joshua*.

⁸⁹ While to my knowledge I am the first person to suggest the settler colonial character of the relevant texts and history in an explicit settler colonial sense, the issues under discussion have already largely been pointed out as such in their individual detail. It is suggested here that seeing matters from a settler colonial perspective greatly clarifies the issues and provides for an enhanced discussion.

⁹⁰ See Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 95-116.

⁹¹ Cf. Davies, *Immoral Bible*, 63-100, 101-119.

⁹² See Davies, *Immoral Bible*, 3-100,

⁹³ A good summary of such approaches is Earl, *Reading Joshua as Christian Scripture*. See also Brett, *Decolonising God*, esp. 62-93.

⁹⁴ The myth of an empty or "virgin" land is one powerful parallel to this; see Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 83-88.

⁹⁵ Cf. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 89-90

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁹⁸ See e.g. Veracini, *Israel and Settler Society*.

⁹⁹ Cf. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 112-115.

¹⁰⁰ E.g. Brett, *Decolonising God*.

¹⁰¹ For some of this, see Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (London: Verso, 2009); *idem.*, *The Invention of the Land of Israel* (London: Verso, 2012).

¹⁰² See e.g. Marc Ferro, *Colonization: A Global History* (London: Routledge, 1997; Original French edn 1994).

¹⁰³ See e.g. Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (London/New York: Penguin Books, 2000); Sand, *Invention of the Jewish People*; *idem.*, *Invention of the Land of Israel*; cf. Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰⁴ See e.g. Robert G. Clouse, *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1977) at a popular level; cf. John M. Court, *Approaching the Apocalypse: A Short History of Christian Millenarianism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008)

¹⁰⁵ As suggested by Davies, *Immoral Bible*.

¹⁰⁶ Granted, many modern missionary organisations have already embraced such an approach.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. e.g. Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005).