The Performance and Embodiment of Hybridity, Porosity, and Interstitial Relationships:

A Vision for the *Journal of Postcolonial Theory and Theology*

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Have we decolonized postcolonial criticism, analysis, theories, and theologies? Gerald

West, *JPTT* board member, coined the term "postcolonial industry" in his essay, "What

Difference Does Postcolonial Biblical Criticism Make?"[1] West suggests that postcolonial

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[1] Gerald West, "What Difference Does Postcolonial Biblical Criticism Make? Reflections from a (South) African perspective," in *Postcolonial Interventions: Essays in Honor of R.S. Sugirtharajah*, ed. Tat-siong Benny Liew (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 256-273.

studies have not been decolonized. West argued that through a commodification of

scholarship, the diasporic scholar risks the elimination of voices and political agendas of

those scholars who "work@home" (anaphora).[2] Those who work@home in a context

such as Africa, West argued, often begin to express their postcolonial concerns by

beginning to talk about HIV/AIDs while those in the diaspora begin with concepts such

as alterity.[3] The two different starting points create a dialogical division when scholars

speak out of their different contexts. When these and other scholars listen in to these

partial exchanges it risks impairing future disengagement with postcolonial criticism. The

danger, West argued, is that theorists will abandon the local concerns of those who

work@home. The goal of the *JPTT* is to expand partial exchanges such as these by

offering all interlocutors the space to make their arguments and put these scholars and

activists in proximity with and one another.

West only mentions work@home and diaspora, but there are other postcolonial

centers too where his broader point is just as relevant. These other centers have

sometimes facilely been named Euro-centric or Western discourse as if they could easily

be grouped as colonized and colonizer. Likewise the same risk emerges with

work@home, diaspora, metropolitan center, and others. These labels point to sharp edged

boundaries that no longer account for the work@home scholar who has studied or taught

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[2] *JPTT* has decided not to italicize foreign words. For example, words such as anaphora, diaspora, or Mestiza will not be italicized in this paper or in the journal. Italics will be used for emphasis only. The colonial distinction between foreign and at home is the type of binary that *JPTT* seeks to move beyond and blur through porous boundaries.

[3] West, 263.

abroad, or the Western scholar that travels to India to challenge his/her own scholarly

inheritance of Orientalism based on imagination and fear alone. Yet the bifurcation of the

divergent interests and culturally distinctive worlds that West described do exist in some

very real sense. One way that postcolonial scholars have referred to these culturally

distinctive worlds is as "wholes." However, whole(s) have not become a common

discipline-specific term, even though it underlies postcolonial work. *JPTT* offers an

alternative vision in contradistinction to the metaphysical unity represented by the

solitary, boundaried rooms of the House of Pansa.[4] McCumber argues, "In the security of

its boundaries, the existence of an organizing center, and the immediate openness of

everything in the house to that center, we have the basic structures of boundary and

disposition."[5] Alternatively to the House of Pansa example, *JPTT* pushes against

boundaried wholes to create multiple dialogical openings that foster porosity, interstitial

relationships, and hybridity.

"Wholes" is not an uncommon term: it has found use in the works of Kwok Pui

Lan, Kathryn Tanner, Laurel Schneider, and others.[6] These scholars have referred to the

colonizing effects of cultural and metaphysical wholes that include totalizing discourses

and meta-narratives, but there is much more than texts at stake. *JPTT* wishes to move

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[4] John McCumber, *Metaphysics and Oppression: Heidegger's Challenge to Western Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 89.

[5] McCumber, 90.

[6] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda For Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 38 and 55; Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 39; Laurel Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity* (London: Routledge, 2008), 2.

from the narrative discourse to a form of performance and embodiment that makes scholarship and the postcolonial more than just discourse terms. Part of West's criticism and the criticism of scholars who work@home in the anaphora is that postcolonial criticism is a theory without embodiment. Postcolonial theory has been sometimes differentiated from liberation hermeneutics and criticized due to its lack of praxis. These debates are well documented and go well beyond the scope of this paper.[7]

Nonetheless, it is relevant and necessary to remember and respond to this critique of postcolonialism as not praxis oriented. Wholes, specifically colonial wholes are where scholars who work@home, in the diaspora, metropolitan centers and others who are unnamed live in their unified isolation alone and apart from others every day. Scholars as people live in boundaried wholes codified by the canons of their spiritual, religious, biological, sociological, ideological and political commitments. Each of these wholes has a prescribed unity of what/who is in and what/who is out as "foreign parts". The reader should not assume that we live in one unified, postcolonial or even colonized whole. Mestizo theologies suggest a postcolonial fluidity and hybridity between many ways of being whereas colonial wholes prescribe a totalizing unity that is as real and visible as the hybridized mestizaje body. To break from the codified commitments of each boundaried whole is to be unfaithful to postcolonial specific agendas.

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[7] R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation" in David Ford and Rachel Muers, *Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 535-552 and Anthony Thiselton, Hermeneutics (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 255-277.

The dialogical division described by West is due to the boundaried nature of the wholes we choose, prefer and have been colonized to live into often even without our awareness. If experience is our guide it may not be possible to change this, but it is as a first step possible to choose to acknowledge the presence of these boundaried wholes. It is possible for the diasporic scholar to make an effort to understand the needs of the work@home scholar so that their postcolonial project is shaped by not just theory but ongoing colonial realities outside of their context. It is possible for scholars in metropolitan centers to desire engagement with scholars who work@home and to include them as partner scholars in postcolonial collaborations and books. It would be helpful for postcolonial scholars to ask more often, in the tradition of Letty Russell, who is not at the table.[8] Although there is some overlap between wholes, there is still a tendency in each specific whole for scholars to privilege their own preferred scholar parts and to exclude through suspicion other non-whole scholar parts. The result each time of these exclusions is to misrepresent postcolonialism as one thing and as not another. These exclusions lead to postcolonial orthodoxies that further sharpen the boundaries between colonial wholes. *JPTT* offers its readers a window into boundaried wholes by bringing all postcolonial scholarship to the forefront. Unless postcolonial scholars engage all scholars in all wholes then there will be a credibility gap with the next generation of postcolonial scholarship.

The *JPTT* desires to publish the work of scholars who work@home, diasporic scholars, scholars in metropolitan centers and scholars unnamed, the subaltern who does

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[8] Letty M. Russell, *Church In The Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 25.

not think that they are worthy to approach a peer review journal. In this way *JPTT* is an activist journal. It is an activist journal in the way that it seeks to make visible the invisible interlocutors whose needs and ideas have continued to be colonized by even the legitimized academies that advocate alternative postcolonial visions. *JPTT*'s plan is to offer means to perform and embody postcolonialism in ways that begin to perforate colonial wholes. *JPTT* enables multiple dialogical opportunities that in time, it is hoped will enable increased engagement between otherwise boundaried wholes through postcolonial scholarship. *JPTT* will publish scholarship from multiple wholes including work@home, diaspora, metropolitan center scholars and across the secular-sacred divide by theorists and theologians.

JPTT builds and expands on the research network collaborations that the Postcolonial Theology Network (PTN) has sponsored around the world. In October at Gordon College the PTN will co-lead a conversation of evangelical scholars as they engage the meaning of postcolonial. Many of these individual scholars thought that they were the only evangelical scholars doing postcolonial work and have appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with others. Next summer the PTN will be in Buenos Aires offering a meeting in memory of Marcella Althaus-Reid and specifically her work on the intersections of postcolonial/queer theories and theologies.[9] The evangelical and queer wholes are often at odds with each other, providing distinctive methodologies and frameworks. Often these frameworks collide, and one defeats the other.

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[9] Marcella Althaus-Reid, Indecent Theology: *Theological Perversions In Sex, Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 7.

The vision of Postcolonial Networks through *JPTT* and PTN is to live in both of these wholes (as well as multiple other wholes) and to publish the scholarship that is produced from each. For now the research network collaborations are still very much held in boundaried wholes. There will be no queer scholars at the evangelical meeting this October at Gordon College and likewise it is unlikely that there will be many evangelicals in Buenos Aires who are trying to incorporate a queer framework into their theologies. Yet the work done by these scholars in their chosen boundaried spaces is among the most promising in postcolonial scholarship. One day it might be possible for queer theorists and evangelicals to meet to explore the postcolonial collaboratively without the need to unify the other into their framework. The *JPTT* in this way brings together many postcolonial frameworks not previously shared in one platform because earlier projects have reflected boundaried restrictions of wholes and have published their discourse in ways often invisible to other wholes.

The desire to immerse oneself into many postcolonial frameworks requires living among and engaging scholars in these many wholes. Postcolonial embodiment and performance presented through *JPTT* is one means forward for scholarly activism. Collaboration with multiple perspectives reduces the likelihood that any ideology will dominate or become universalized. Of course there is a desire to propagate one's framework, but the decisive question is if it is your desire for this framework to eliminate other frameworks? *JPTT* publishes many versions of universalizing postcolonial frameworks, but the act of publishing them together will decenter all of them and prevent any one framework from being dominant. *JPTT* partners with the PTN and PN

participation in multiple research projects. *JPTT* in a similar way as the PTN and in its research network collaborations will demonstrate the simulation of simultaneously multiple rooms (wholes) around the world interacting in quickly forming dialogues that pierce the veil of any one room and its totalizing whole potential.

What's possible online on the PTN has not often been embodied in live meetings in boundaried wholes with a few exceptions. A dozen PTN members traveled to India in January 2010 to "Envisioning Postcolonial Theologies to Decolonize the Body of Christ" held at United Theological College in Bangalore, India. Without the communications possibilities offered by the PTN it is very unlikely that these scholars in their boundaried wholes would have heard of a similar conference opportunity. Even if scholars heard about a postcolonial meeting in India, it is unlikely that they would attend in the same numbers as these did. The difference is that these scholars were provoked by their online relationships with scholars in India enough to give them the desire to expand their worldview otherwise bounded to their whole. PTN's virtual rooms offer an aerial or spatial glimpse of postcolonial societies not yet realized in most offline exchanges. *JPTT* takes the aerial view another step forward.

JPTT's approach to countering orthodox biases that flow from boundaried wholes is to publish scholarship from as many wholes as possible. Is it possible that offline we are all vulnerable to narrow windows that preclude a wider postcolonial vision? It is possible that scholars in work@home, diaspora and metropolitan center wholes have partial vision that precludes a postcolonial experience of polyvocality? The postcolonial polyvocality is implicit in the postcolonial project (s) but to date it has not been explicit and widely

visible due to the exclusive reliance on single place/location meetings and printed

journals. These printed forms (often at expensive rates of subscription) preserve an elite

authorship and readership. The online and open access nature of *JPTT* broadens the

postcolonial project beyond the exclusive dominance or bias of any one whole whether

the diaspora, work@home or metropolitan centers. *JPTT*'s goal is to showcase

scholarship for scholars to place each in proximity to the other to avoid the creation of

new totalizing unities.

Introduction to the Problem with Colonial Wholes

The pervasiveness of colonial wholes in postcolonial scholarship is on one level

counter-intuitive. Postcolonial theorists and theologians have consistently questioned

wholes that are based on the presumption of one world, self-containment, unity,

totalization and the binaries that they produce such as powerful/powerless, inside/outside,

included/excluded and dark/light. Homi Bhabha argued that, "The struggle against

colonial oppression not only changes the direction of Western history, but challenges its

historicist idea of time as a progressive, ordered whole."[10] Kathryn Tanner's critique of

the anthropological, modern whole was summarized by "The administration of colonized

peoples requires a totalizing vision of them; it helps if they can be seen as manageable

wholes."[11] Tanner locates the boundaried whole to the anthropological, social whole as

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[10] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 59

[11] Tanner, 43.

understood as the modern version of the whole.[12] Tanner's critique of the whole has been

influential for other postcolonial theologians. Yet it is insufficient to merely challenge

social wholes as Tanner does without also challenging ontological and epistemological

wholes too. Kwok acknowledges the power of the whole, "While I do not wish to

undermine anyone's desire for a meaningful whole, I want to caution against the

enormous power of that desire – the lure to shape things into one, unified, seemingly,

seamless whole."[13]

Schneider further grounds and connects the whole to monotheistic theology, which

is "schooled in theologies of the One… [and] suffocates in closures of the Whole."[14] The

basis of monotheistic theologies has been in part Western ontologies influenced by

whole-parts. However, postcolonial theologians based on Tanner's critique have limited

their critique to social wholes that have shaped cultures. Postcolonial theologians have

rejected Western metaphysics and ontologies, but without critical analysis. The result has

been a lack of self-reflexive postcolonial criticism from within post(colonial) wholes that

challenges the ongoing impact such as have been identified here in postcolonial contexts.

Despite these eloquent critiques of wholes, West is right that a "postcolonial

industry" dominates conversations, decides the agenda and executes the strategies. It

might be more accurate to speak of the plural form of industries. The suggestion of the

plural continues with the argument outlined here that there are many wholes that advocate

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[12] Tanner, 38.

[13] Kwok, 39.

[14] Schneider, 2

to be "the" one legitimate postcolonial voice. The postcolonial industries are enabled by boundaried and unquestioned wholes. Postcolonial theorists and theologians who serve these postcolonial industries may have successfully relocated the monolithic imperial whole from empires to academies, theorists to theologians or contexts to diaspora. Nonetheless, the whole notwithstanding the critiques of Abraham, Bhabha, Kwok, Schneider, and Tanner has been sustained and multiplied as parts continue to be subordinated. Tanner argued for postcolonial porous wholes. Tanner did not reject wholes as a colonial practice. Given West's critique, where is the evidence that porous wholes exist within the postcolonial scholarly communities?

There are other boundaried wholes beyond anaphora, diaspora and metropolitan centers that have shaped colonial and postcolonial wholes. Other formidable wholes that impede more expansive postcolonial work are those that keep firm divisions between postcolonial theory and postcolonial theology. While theorists and theologians around the world have critiqued wholes as demonstrated above, their research and writing has been primarily, as West argued, conceptual, but has rarely changed the way they perform and embody their scholarship. Some postcolonial scholars like Fernando F. Segovia and *JPTT* board member R. S. Sugirtharjah have proposed reading strategies for interpreting beyond borders, but even these arguments have for the most part been limited to textual analysis not cross-border relationships as West described in his aforementioned essay.[15] Despite postcolonial scholars' arguments for porous, interstitial wholes, often these same

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[15] Fernando F. Segovia, *Interpreting Beyond Borders* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); and R. S. Sugirtharjah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003), 122-126.

theorists and theologians have continued to live, work and write within their self-identified and substantially boundaried wholes that otherwise diminish the realization of their interstitial visions.

Rather than pointing out specific texts through my own bias, it is suggested that readers review the bibliography of any texts identified as postcolonial and count the number of instances that scholars who work@home and/or diaspora scholars are cited outside of the author's specific country and or postcolonial ideological stance. Likewise it has been difficult to locate postcolonial works of those who work@home available in America or Europe. The lack of availability is in part a result of the bias of publishers against scholars who work@home and whose work has not yet been proven to the satisfaction of the heads of the postcolonial industries. It is necessary to point out the irony in silencing those who are professionally marginalized within an industry that has commodified marginalization.

However, the challenges are even more complicated than West suggested. There is more at stake than just a dialogical divide between work@home and diaspora contexts. A general lack of commitment to online e-books versus conventional print has led to the tri-furcation of work@home, diaspora, and metropolitan center wholes. It would also be understandable given the way that West argues that work@home scholarship has been commodified by diaspora for work@home scholars to protect their work by keeping it within their publishing control and limiting access by others around the world. Collectively in this way each whole functions as impenetratable wholes with its own subordinated and excluded parts. As impenetratable wholes these postcolonial scholarly

worlds are made as narrow as the colonial wholes that each whole has sought to

overcome. The missing piece between liberation hermeneutics and postcolonial criticism

is praxis. The impetus to perforate wholes is symbolic of the need to move outside of our

epistemological and cultural preferences towards performance and embodiment of

postcolonial commitments.

Closed Wholes and the Vision for Porous Wholes

For at least the last decade postcolonialism and elitism have been synonymous with

the isolated nature of Western scholarship with token mention of diaspora and

work@home scholars. There has been too little action taken by the academy to change

who controls the discourse. The postcolonial rhetoric often does not align with the

absence of marginalized voices. Postcolonial scholars have criticized "postcolonial" as

essentialist, universal, and totalitarian while still silencing the very scholarship it

otherwise claims to advocate. Typically it has been argued that the discourse is silencing

not the scholars but this is an example of the removed indifference and full claim of

scholarly agency that could make different choices with different outcomes including a

different discourse. As was noted above in the previous section postcolonial scholars

often write within their boundaried wholes not often citing those scholars outside of their

preferred whole demonstrating their immunity to these criticisms.

Still the move beyond elitism is not so simple as to be addressed by inclusive, anti-

oppression processes associated with postcolonial analysis. The Eurocentric critique is

only part of the problem. There are many structural sources for an unreflective

postcolonial consciousness not the least organization by discipline and sub-discipline; Eurocentric, diaspora and first peoples; digitally privileged and at the divide; speaker and subaltern; and secular versus religious ideological divides. Citation practices are one means of diagnosing these divides by observation of who cites whom and who is never cited.

Wholes are so thoroughly ingrained in the scholarly and activist culture that scholars often miss their own postcolonial critique. Risk associated with parochial wholes is that they are overly controlled with one powerful ideological group. The downside is that then postcolonial is associated with one group in a way that too easily lets others distance their critical reflection about the postcolonial. Postcolonial scholarship risks a credibility challenge if it does not soon practice what it purports to teach. The *JPTT* embarks on what is likely to be a one to two decade project. It will be a multi-decade project to engage these complex challenges.

The launch of the *JPTT* marks another step along the way within an ambitious long-term goal that invites re-envisioning the next generation of postcolonial theory and theology. If multi-vocality is a way past parochial perspectives, then porosity of boundaried wholes will be the single most important dimension of future postcolonial scholarship. *JPTT* will disrupt the conventional boundaried space between disciplines, work@home scholars, diaspora, European and white scholars, contextual and transnational. *JPTT* offers a space to perform and embody interstitial relations that resist false theoretical unities. To accomplish this goal every aspect of the journal has been

thought through to inspire and enable this kind of transdisciplinary and transnational research and writing.

The vision is that *JPTT* puts scholars across the postcolonial disciplines in proximity to one another. Technology enables proximities without the fusion that produces totalizing unities. In this way the worlds that scholars live in, as self-defined, disciplinary, ideological, boundaried wholes are able to practice porosity and become more seamlessly open to scholars working in other boundaried wholes. Privilege has often been used for voyeuristic purposes of oppression through techniques of commodification.

Technology will quickly make visible such commodifcation and the *JPTT* community of scholars will be among the first to push the standards of online scholarly exchange. Postcolonial consciousness requires living outside of self-defined, totalizing wholes and technology enables this kind of performance and embodiment. *JPTT*'s goal is not to unite or even globally centralize postcolonial scholars on the web through Postcolonial Networks, but rather to offer a glimpse of the rich complexities of postcolonial scholarship in a multiplicity of wholes that rarely have been allowed to touch one another or in some cases even be globally visible.

Reading in proximity to scholars working in other wholes should prevent scholars from speaking in exclusive ways that suggest a postcolonial orthodoxy that is inspired by or serves only one whole without attention to other wholes, seen and unseen. The *JPTT* anticipates that the quality of postcolonial engagement will be enhanced by recognizing and acknowledging previously colonized scholars. Without *JPTT* the dominant

postcolonial industry will continue to actively ignore, silence, commodify, and render invisible those not part of the controlling whole(s). *JPTT* does not claim to give voice to the subaltern in ways that would otherwise negate Spivak's paradoxical challenge, but technology can be used to avoid the creation of new subalterns that is otherwise produced by ideologically isolated scholarship.

JPTT, as one genre of writing will have the potential of a transforming influence on the way postcolonial scholarship is undertaken in the future. The technology is more than a tool that facilitates the journal to be online. The online, and open access nature is a major feature that represents the way technology serves as a postcolonial asset for both younger scholars and those working in areas of the world that lack the financial strength to afford expensive print journals. Financial disadvantage cannot be predicted or located to one locale. Often predictions of disadvantage are a carryover of further marginalization that perpetuates colonizing frameworks. Issues of race, class, and gender are complexly intertwined without privilege to any one location. As the perceived disadvantaged is served others are not served. The technology of an online journal, website, and Facebook groups offers opportunities for different ways of publishing scholarship that undermines elitism.

JPTT Perforates Colonial Wholes

Wholes are not easily perforated. They are based on competing epistemologies, cosmologies and ontologies that unify to intentionally exclude and subordinate foreign parts. Wholes are pierced by *JPTT*'s vision to challenge the implicit totalizing structures

associated with postcolonial scholarship. As an online journal whose editors look across

all wholes for the highest quality of scholarship, *JPTT* seeks to perforate each whole to

create new dialogical windows and opportunities that will over time transform the future

of postcolonial contributions by theorists and theologians. The narrow bias problem

described by Gerald West has been expanded not to scold or shame any postcolonial

scholar in any one whole, but rather to demonstrate the urgent need of capturing all the

voices and thinkers from all contexts who are concerned about the postcolonial and to

draw them each into a wider sphere of dialogue with each other.

These are not new ideas as West has already questioned postcolonial orthodoxies

that have diminished the authority and power of postcolonial criticism. What are new are

the technological tools for postcolonial scholars to practice what they teach through

performance and embodiment. It is refreshing to witness to the emergence of

postcolonial scholarly activism. In India Rev. Dr. Jacob Devadason who has his PhD

from the University of Manchester and did his thesis in Dalit Liberation Theology

embodies his commitments through the orphanage he runs in India. In Australia Mark

Brett embodies his postcolonial work as an advocate for aboriginal rights. *JPTT* board

member, Margaret Robinson works as a bisexual activist in Toronto in ways that

embodies her scholarship published in the *Journal of Bisexuality*. These postcolonial

forms of embodiment and scholar activism are to be celebrated. Again, the new form of

embodiment is to exploit technologies to practice hybridity, porosity and interstitial

relationships. These practices, it is argued, will promote more valuable work towards

creating postcolonial societies that question the privileging of one whole over the other.

The *JPTT* will facilitate relationships with scholars across the many wholes, as the board composition implies. The *JPTT* will assist in the performance and practice of postcolonial embodiment as it offers a window into other wholes. The *JPTT* represents and for the   first time offer theorists and theologians the opportunity to practice hybridity and intersectionality through virtual, online platforms. As an essential dimension online scholarship must no longer be seen as an extra-curricular activity. Unless scholars choose to participate fully in these new means of communication they risk undermining the scholarly value of their work. It is not just a virtual meeting between scholars from boundaried wholes that is the postcolonial event. The event is the embodiment of porous wholes, but not just porosity for porosity's sake. Through this embodiment postcolonial scholarship from any one lens or whole will be broadened by the breadth of postcolonial scholarship. Embodiment will begin to remove the dialogical impediments provoked by West's distinction between local liberation hermeneutics and Western postcolonial theories.

In the past it would have been unthinkable for a scholar not to do a thorough literature review of their research question. In the future it will be as unthinkable for scholars not to acknowledge the scholarship undertaken in all wholes. It will be unthinkable for postcolonial scholars not to perform and embody their concepts and no longer see online activities such as these as playtime. Performance and embodiment take postcolonial concepts and theories and actualizes them through individual and political bodies. Performance makes the epistemological and ontological visions a postcolonial practice and praxis. Embodiment makes the practice and praxis personal to move beyond

the impersonal scholarly idea of postcolonial. To perform hybridity and embody it means taking the risk of beginning with one's own body to envision a postcolonial hybridized body/ies in and through scholarly engagement. It is the postcolonial performance of interstitiality that has shaped the way *JPTT* will conduct itself as a journal. The *JPTT* is more than just a new journal in an online form. How will these various writing styles inform the postcolonial practice of embodiment and performance?

Three Writing Platforms Facilitate Crossover Wholes Engagement

All scholarship is on the precipice of change because of the unprecedented technologies available for research, networking, collaboration and peer critique. Our collection of tools including PTN on Facebook, the Postcolonial Networks (PN) website (http://postcolonialnetworks.com) and the *JPTT* leverages these technologies to participate and lead the use of these tools for the advantage of the postcolonial scholarly and activism communities. PN is an umbrella term for this goal as well as the name of a website. PN offers three different online platforms with several different types of writing opportunities and networking. With three platforms the *JPTT*, PN and PTN editors have great latitude to evaluate and consider a paper beyond the simple and conventional yes or no. Our peer reviewers and the board have made it a priority to give additional time to work with scholars who are making an effort to publish their first paper, particularly in those contexts where people have been historically marginalized. *JPTT* adheres to the highest academic standards of peer review, as it publishes liberative, porous, multi-disciplinary work. At the same time, *JPTT* has also made it a priority to work with

scholars to make sure that their work meets these standards so that the entire academic community benefits from their vision. *JPTT* does not just search for publishable papers; it also seeks to identify the next generation of postcolonial scholars. We want to be the journal that published the first paper of future world-renowned postcolonial scholars.

There will be occasions when due to a variety of reasons including internalized oppression papers may not directly come to the *JPTT*. One way the *JPTT* can counter this oppression is to identify promising papers that surface through the other two platforms for the journal. Likewise PN will cross post journal articles to the PTN and PN. Through these platforms *JPTT* is in a position to commission journal articles as the editors surf the net watching for indications of early ideas on postcolonial papers, books and conferences that lead to publishable papers.

Editorial flexibility such as has been described here is intended as a way to ally with all scholars so their voices are heard and developed as early as possible so as to contribute to the development of the next generation of postcolonial scholars. The advantage is also expanding the postcolonial conversation from a few elite scholars that prioritize exclusive, orthodox postcolonial visions. Among those who may gain power from this new form are independent researchers and graduate students. There has been steady rise in adjunct faculty and independent researchers who either due to choice, marginalization or economics do not have the privilege of a full-time faculty appointment. The advantage to graduate students is that they no longer passively wait for the permission of a PhD to legitimize the authority of their voice. *JPTT* provides academic rigor that broaden the confines of current legitimacy from only degree

conferring programs. Readers should recall the fact that Gloria Anzaldua's work was the subject of many PhD dissertations long before she had received her PhD from the University of California at Santa Cruz.[16] *JPTT* has organized itself to find the next Gloria Anzaldua time and time again. The development for individual scholars is obvious, but the contribution to rapid expansion of postcolonial materials around the world will begin in time to take its effect. These three writing platforms disrupt the otherwise limited, elite and exclusive dominance by the captains of postcolonial industries who choose and exclude much material.

Postcolonial Theology Network (PTN)

The first online platform was the Postcolonial Theology Network (PTN) that was organized as a group on Facebook in September 2008. The PTN began as a means to follow-up to a postcolonial meeting at the University of Manchester in England in May 2008 to facilitate post meeting networking and relationships. The initial handful of post-meeting participants was joined by almost 75-100 people per month over the last two years. Unlike many Facebook groups that were satisfied by pure numbers of fans or members who liked a particular theme, the PTN quickly became recognized around the world as a place to meet and to post thoughtful inquiries on intersections with postcolonial theology. Over a period of a year, those who would be unlikely coexistent members of other Facebook groups came to know the PTN for its diversity of members

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[16] Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

and posts. The PTN has generated a diversity of posts representing a multiplicity of

contexts, faiths, identities, ideologies and subjectivities. The PTN is still a Facebook

group even as it has grown in prestige and acknowledgement, as scholars have

recognized its contribution through words of appreciation, by virtue of the fact that some

postcolonial scholars joined Facebook in part so as to join the PTN and the way

publishers have provided review copies of books to PTN book reviewers.

As part of Facebook, it comes with its own set of racial and class divisions as have

been discussed in a number of news accounts and is beginning to draw the appropriate

attention of scholars of technology. The PTN at best represents another way of doing

theology in a technological age when theologians can no longer ignore these tools.

Technology is outpacing our print-based editorial expectations and methodologies.

Technological sophistication has evolved to the point where we must question traditional

assessments of scholarship and methods. No longer is it possible to discount online tools

as beneath the quality of offline literature. The speed of online networking offers benefits

for access that might be able to overcome the way marginalized scholars continue to be

unpublished. Unless online tools are thought of differently than marginalized scholars

will not experience any gain or change. The practice of citing group members or other

scholars in a Facebook post is one way of raising the expected standard of online

scholarly communications. PTN members have asked if they could add their posted book

review to their CV and though the reviews have been of high quality, I have been

reluctant to encourage scholars to acknowledge their posts including book reviews as

published works. Nonetheless, it is a reasonable question to ask what denotes a published work. However, a practice of citation will quickly raise the standard and usage.

In the meantime even though there remains no quick answers to these questions, it became rapidly apparent that the PTN was a distinctive genre of writing and networking for postcolonial scholars, pastors and activists. One PTN member, Michael McLaughlin, a member of faculty at St. Leo's University in USA advises his undergraduates to read the PTN for a global overview of the status of postcolonial theology in different cadences, contexts and lenses. McLaughlin's choice for the way to use the PTN points to the PTN's greatest strength.

Unlike print journals that often publish dated material that is no longer timely by its date of publication, *JPTT* in collaboration with the PTN and PN offers the advantage of being able to respond quickly to new developments. The instantaneous nature of online communications helps foster conversations while topics are still most relevant, as well as enabling cross-boundary praxis in times of need.

Postcolonial Networks (PN)

The alternative introduced by PN goes beyond what could be coined as "blog theology" or "blog theory." Blog theology or theory is the privileged viewpoint of one author using technological resources to spread a unifying political message that leads to an action. There is room and a need for blog theologies and theories, but that is quite different than the PN vision that seeks to move beyond universalizing messages to organize one whole against other wholes. The pervasiveness of wholes and the repetitive

practice of whole-making that has contributed to polarized forms of politics and theologies have created the need for the PTN, PN, and the *JPTT*.

As widespread a reputation as the PTN has enjoyed, theology as a keyword in its group identifier kept more than a few postcolonial theorists and other people from non-Christian faith perspectives away from PTN group discussions. The PN website was established in September 2010 for postcolonial theorists and theologians who are scholars in MA/PhD programs or faculty, pastors and activists. The PN has several editors who have responsibility for arts, film, book reviews, profiles and a new genre of writing, entitled Postcolonial Body Performance Narratives (PBPN). With the exception of book reviews these are all content areas that the PTN has not typically produced.

Each PN tool has its own benefits. The PTN excels at networking with the expansive range of Facebook members. The PTN is an ideal space for those new to postcolonial theological scholarship to introduce their scholarship in process, post research inquiries and questions to a larger network. The PN website on the other hand offers more expansive opportunities to connect the postcolonial beyond theology into areas of film, arts and literature. The goal is for the traditional line between theorists and theologians to become blurred through these tools and content areas. PTN and PN complement each other. The PTN has great networking potential, but the Facebook profile does not provide much in the way of scholars telling other scholars about their work as the PN profiles has been designed to accomplish.

A major feature of the PN is the introduction of a new genre of postcolonial writing. Postcolonial Body Performance Narratives (PBPN's) have been designed to encourage

reflection on colonized and colonizing bodies at the intersection of other bodies. PBPN's authorize the use of the excluded and silenced "I" discouraged by scholarly journals. The colonized bodies are not systems but rather personalized encounters with one's own colonized body or the colonizer's body through a postcolonial lens that counters the colonizing system of oppression. PBPN's coupled with *JPTT* articles and the PTN offer a more complex range of opportunities to reflect on the postcolonial. Without both PBPN's and scholarly articles the postcolonial project(s) will never advance beyond a very elite audience of scholars. Then postcolonial visions are empty without any political, cultural or epistemological force.

Beyond Wholes: The Next Generation of Postcolonial Scholarship

Senior scholars and younger scholars will meet through *JPTT*, PN, and PTN. Conversations that emerge through these online intersections have the potential to reconfigure the power dynamics of senior/junior, faculty/student, etc. Postcolonial scholarship stands to be one of the most significant beneficiaries of these technological advances.

Niche scholarship such as digitized diaspora in books, such as the one written by Andoni Alonso and Pedro Oiarzabal, points to a larger trend that will transform postcolonial scholarship.[17] The State University of New York Press website described Anna Everett's book, *Digital Diaspora: A Race for Cyberspace,* as showing how

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[17] Andoni Alonso and Pedro Oiarzabal, *Diasporas in The New Media Age: Identity, Politics, and Community* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2010).

"African Americans and African diasporic peoples developed the necessary technomastery to ride in front of the bus on the information superhighway."[18] Scholars like Alonso, Oiarzabal, and Everett are using technologies to help marginalized people organize online in ways that alleviate suffering and mobilize political power across transnational boundaries.The next generation of postcolonial scholars will not just think in terms of postcolonial concepts, but will necessarily practice the interstitial, porous relationships through online networking and broad accessibility to scholarship produced across all wholes. The next generation will embody and perform these practices not only online but online will influence their offline writings too. There will cease to be the same theoretical-experiential gap that Gerald West described between postcolonial criticism and liberation hermeneutics.

The next generation of postcolonial scholarship through online technologies will introduce new questions. Due to the urgency of these questions and their intersectional overlap, Sopher Press will launch the *Journal of Technology, Theology, and Religion* (*JTTR*) later this month, October 2010, at www.techandreligion.com. A major emphasis will be on the intersections of technologies, religion, and postcolonial and disapora research. Both journals will have film and book reviews to offer a multiplicity of intellectual and cultural expressions. In addition to the obvious need for some attention to online referencing patterns, it will be necessary to address the complexities with identity

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[18] Anna Everett, *Digital Diaspora: A Race for Cyberspace* (New York: SUNY Press, 2009), and http://www.sunpress.edu/p-4722-digital-diaspora.aspx.

formation, the legitimization of collaborative research, and further expansion of the theoretical as experiential and political.

The beginning of change through technology as well as challenges that will take time to address might be symbolized by a discussion of the movie Avatar that took place last January on the PTN. Scholars and students engaged each other crossing conventional power boundaries in ways that have rarely been mobilized after the introduction of the Frierian model.[19] PTN members who saw the movie and those who did not both had the opportunity to participate in the conversation. By breaking these two more traditional dialogical power and authority patterns, new intersectional events emerged including the ways the conversation provoked new interest. Noticeably absent from the conversation were PTN members from India or Africa though these Facebook members have Internet access they chose not to participate. Issues of disengagement go beyond privilege constraints such as the digital divide. Some PTN members who had been to India for the January 2010 PTN meeting went to see Avatar as a group from many different countries even asked for an Indian perspective, but none came. The technology visibly shows the possibility of connection and even more visibly the existing divisions between cultural and epistemological wholes and the new power to choose not to participate.

An even more in depth analysis will be made of the PTN Avatar conversation at the American Academy of Religion's wildcard session on Theology and Technology: Intersecting Realities in November 2010 at its annual meeting held this year in Atlanta. In the meantime with the launch of the *JPTT*, Sopher Press, the editorial board, and the

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[19] Paulo Freire, *pedagogy of the oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1998).

journal's editors make a step forward, participating in the diversification of published

scholarship that will come out of many wholes, often previously unheard from. At the

same time *JPTT* participates in the struggle that needs to overcome other (still-invisible

even if fully understood or articulated) technological, identity, and power challenges.

The technology may be ahead of desires or the trust of the anaphora that the power of the

postcolonial industries can be decentered. Perhaps then, it will be necessary for *JPTT* to

first foster among all its readers their desire to be proximate to scholars writing out of

other wholes. *JPTT* and PN envision a "post" postcolonial industries approach to

scholarship and activism.