



## **Augustine the African: Post-colonial, Postcolonial, and Post-Postcolonial Readings**

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Who was Augustine of Hippo? Very recently this question was readily answerable; the data – not only for Augustine’s life, but for his internal motivations – were well preserved, verified and accessible. All that remained was for a modern biographer to collect, analyze and relay the objective information about the correlation of Augustine’s cultural context, his psychological rationale, and his outward actions. Peter Brown, who has written the

quintessential modern biography of Augustine for English speakers, reflects on his own work to say,

I had begun in 1961 in a conventional manner, intending to write a study of Augustine's life and times. By 1963 I realized that I could do something more than that – I could write the story of the inner growth, in a variety of changing circumstances, of a single, ever changing person. I followed the 'long inner journeys' of a man who had lived some sixteen hundred years before my time, largely because that man had talked about himself in such a way as to make a biography possible.<sup>1</sup>

This optimism about the ability to write objective biography and history has now been abandoned in scholarship, as seen in studies of Augustine's life such as that of James J. O'Donnell.

O'Donnell's subtitle, "A New Biography," calls attention to his concern with past approaches. The need is not simply for a "new" (as in "more recent") biography, but for a "new *kind*" of biography. Nicholas Baker-Brian analyzes O'Donnell's contribution to conclude,

What actually emerges most clearly from O'Donnell's biography are the many lives of Augustine which are waiting to be written, for instance: Augustine the provincial; Augustine the Roman citizen; Augustine the Manichaeian; Augustine the catholic; and Augustine the politician. ... Thus, rather than being a biography of Augustine, or indeed, a biography of one of these

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<sup>1</sup> P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: 2000), 488f. n. 16.

Augustines, O'Donnell's study is a 'Versuch', an extension of possibilities into the future directions of Augustinian biography.<sup>2</sup>

It is suggested here, that one such "future direction" for Augustinian studies should be a postcolonial reading which focuses on Augustine as an African.<sup>3</sup>

The immediate flaw in any attempt to replace a Roman Augustine with an African caricature is the failure to appreciate Augustine in his multi-cultural context as mediated through his polyvocal writings. The aim of the present study is to move beyond the false dichotomy of "either Roman or African," and better appreciate both Augustine's Roman-ness and his non-Roman-ness. Postcolonial readings, as will be discussed below, attempt to deconstruct the binary opposition of colonizer/colonized, but in order to do so, voice must first be given to the colonized in order to recover the periphery and thereby decentre the category of colonizer. The present article's use of the demarcation "Augustine the African" adopts this postcolonial strategy and thereby decentres Augustine's *romanitas* in light of his North African context, but it does not in turn eclipse Augustine's Roman identity by suggesting that Augustine was only – or even primarily – an African. Before undertaking a postcolonial (no hyphen) reading of Augustine, which is a heuristic framework, this study will first survey post-colonial (with the chronologically indicative hyphen) readings of Augustine, which is a phenomenological framework. The post-colonial readings will then provide a Gadamerian-epistemological backdrop to a postcolonial analysis. By way of conclusion, this discussion will re-visit the

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<sup>2</sup> "Modern Augustinian Biographies: Revisions and Counter-Memories," *Zeitschrift für Antike und Christentum* 11 (1 2007): 151-167.

<sup>3</sup> For a review and bibliography of other "New Directions," in Augustinian studies, see the section in Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 482-520.

inherent problem with replacing the Roman Augustine with a postcolonial African and suggest “post-postcolonial” possibilities for Augustine studies.

### *Post-colonial Readings*

Before applying the reading strategy known as postcolonial theory to Augustine’s works, it will prove helpful to survey examples of post-colonial readings. The latter refers to the temporal phenomenon of belonging to a colonized milieu. Authors who have experienced the effects of colonization and oppression, including the aftermath (thus the temporal “post-” in “post-colonialism”) of such events, often accentuate the occurrence of multiple and conflicting identities which emerge in said contexts. While it is tempting to forego a survey of post-colonial examples and move immediately into historical and literary analysis, the following section is needed in order to improve such analysis by (1) avoiding any pretensions to pure objectivity found all too often in modern studies and by (2) illustrating some of the possible “Augustines” available to readers who are sensitive to the North African’s relationship to the Roman Empire. The first example of a post-colonial reader of Augustine offered here is the famous Continental philosopher, Jacques Derrida.

Although Derrida is more widely known as a post-structuralist, deconstructionist and postmodernist, there are certain aspects of his works that can be classified as post-colonial.<sup>4</sup> Coming from Algeria, Derrida confesses that he never felt truly French enough for Parisian

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Wise, “Saying ‘Yes’ to Africa: Jacques Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx*,” *Research in African Literatures* 33 (4 2002) 124-142.

society – he was “a little black and very Arab Jew.”<sup>5</sup> One of Derrida’s more post-colonial moments is in his work, *Circumfession: Fifty-nine Periods and Periphrases*, which was written in response to his friend Geoffrey Bennington’s *Derridabase*, and which is his own accommodation of Augustine’s *Confessions*.<sup>6</sup> Derrida likens himself to Augustine, whom he calls “my compatriot,” since they are both from North Africa, and he underscores how both he and Augustine have crossed the Mediterranean to a mixed reception and ambiguous success.<sup>7</sup> Even Derrida’s mother, like Monnica, is dying across the sea from their home in North Africa. While Derrida’s work sheds little light on the current study of Augustine, he illustrates how post-colonial readers can find the ancient African bishop to inhabit multiple and conflicted selves.

In turning from the literary and philosophical influence of Derrida to the religious and ethnic discussions of Black and African theology, one influential voice is that of Cyprian Davis, who contends, “All black history begins in Africa.”<sup>8</sup> Davis then discusses a number of patristic writers from Africa, such as Origen, Athanasius, Cyril, Moses the Black, Tertullian and Cyprian, only Davis speaks of them as Romans. Davis then addresses Augustine’s identity:

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<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey Bennington and Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Bennington (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 58.

<sup>6</sup> This work is in Bennington and Derrida, *Jacques Derrida (op. cit.)* For commentary and discussion, see John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1997); Bruno Clément, *L’Invention du commentaire: Augustin, Jacques Derrida* (Paris 2000); Hélène Cixous, *Portrait de Jacques Derrida en Jeune Saint Juif* (Paris 2001); and the essays in Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds.), *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press 2005).

<sup>7</sup> *Jacques Derrida*, 18. Similarly, Albert Camus developed an interest in Augustine as a paradigmatic figure who embraced a certain duality: see discussion in Aïcha Kassoul and Mohamed Lakhdar Maougal, *The Algerian Destiny of Albert Camus* (Bethesda, MD: Academica Press, 2006) 271ff. Camus’ concern influenced André Mandouze’s monumental work on Augustine (*Saint Augustin, l’aventure de la raison et de la grâce* [Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1968]).

<sup>8</sup> *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 1.

For many, St. Augustine and his mother, St. Monica, are two examples of black Africa's contribution to history and world civilization. Certainly, Augustine can be ranked as one of the most brilliant theologians and ecclesiastics of all times. For African American Catholics in the nineteenth century, there was a singular pride in being able to point to Augustine as one of their own. But was he in fact black?<sup>9</sup>

While Davis never answers this question directly, he nevertheless insists, "He was not a European, despite his long sojourn in Italy."

Other examples of post-colonial readings of Augustine can be found among African theologians of recent decades. While African theology cannot be simplified as simply a post-colonial expression, many African theologians explicitly aim to counter the western and colonialist aspects of the Christianization of Africa, and in so doing African theologians often define themselves as non-western, and these same authors often describe their own work as a post-colonial expression.<sup>10</sup> The following examples of African theologians, therefore, serve as possible interpretations of Augustine, especially when he is viewed with a heightened concern about his allegiance to colonial power.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Examples of explicitly post-colonial descriptions of African theology by African theologians include Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), and Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, trans. John O'Donohue (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> Many Black and African theologians refer to Augustine (see David Wilhite, "Black Augustine," in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, ed. Karla Pollman et al [Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming]). Those cited below represent this concern with colonialism.

Augustine is acknowledged as an African church father by G.C. Oosthuizen, and so a Christian presence does predate the missionary movement of recent centuries.<sup>12</sup> The church, however, in western North Africa (as opposed to Egypt) was “not truly an African Church; its members were from the Roman and Greek middle classes, the colonists who lived apart from the indigenous peoples.”<sup>13</sup> A few years later, Nigerian theologian Akin J. Omoyajowo cites Oosthuizen, but with a twofold view of Augustine.<sup>14</sup> Augustine is in one sense a “fellow-African,” yet in another sense Augustine sided with the emperor against the “truly African church” made up of the “Berbers.”<sup>15</sup> Another African theologian who finds a two-sided Augustine is Mercy Amba Oduyoye:

The history of Christianity in Africa does not substantiate the concept of a uniform or monolithic African theology in the past or present. I do not intend to disown Augustine, a true son of Africa. I only suggest that the truly African spirit apparent in all these controversies was that manifested by the Montanists [namely, Tertullian] and the Donatists.<sup>16</sup>

Oduyoye does not explain what it means to be a “true son of Africa,” yet she is obviously correct in the sense that the geographical location of Augustine’s life and writings in Africa is undeniable, as is his allegiances to the Roman empire. Harvey J. Sindima calls this twofold

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<sup>12</sup> G.C. Oosthuizen, *Post Christianity in Africa* (London: C. Hurst, 1968), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Omoyajowo, “An African Expression of Christianity,” in *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, ed. Basil Moore (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973), 81-92.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 81-3.

<sup>16</sup> Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 19.

aspect of Augustine's identity one of the ancient writer's "inconsistencies."<sup>17</sup> That is to say, on the one hand, Augustine should not be divorced from his African context and thereby ideologically portrayed as "non-African."<sup>18</sup> But on the other hand, "the Church of Augustine" failed to win the Donatists and evangelize Africa because it was too aligned with the Roman Empire.<sup>19</sup> While the few examples provided here cannot be considered representative of all African theology,<sup>20</sup> they do illustrate how theologians writing from a post-colonial context often find Augustine to be in some way African, while also distancing such a demarcation, because Augustine is simultaneously seen as Roman.

One final example is worth mentioning where Augustine is viewed from a post-colonial context: in April 2001 Algeria's president hosted an international conference of scholars under the banner, "Saint Augustin: Africanité et Universalité."<sup>21</sup> While the papers presented were in themselves perhaps not post-colonial, the event itself, which sparked physical violence in the streets, certainly was: many Algerians resented President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's attempt to westernize their country by invoking a pre-Islamic heritage. Once again, Augustine is seen as

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<sup>17</sup> *Religious and Political Ethics in Africa: A Moral Inquiry* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 86.

<sup>18</sup> *Drums of Redemption: An Introduction to African Christianity* (London: Greenwood Press, 1994), xi.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 41; Sindima is quoting Jean-Mark Ela, *African Cry*, trans. Robert r. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 10.

<sup>20</sup> e.g. J.J. Ongong'a, "Augustine's Contribution to Church and State," *Africa Theological Journal* 21 (2 1992): 118-29, attempts to revivify Augustine's views toward the state for contemporary African Christianity. Another helpful discussion of the African/Roman tension in Augustine's polemics against the Donatists is found in Robert E. Hood, *Must God Remain Greek? Afro Cultures and God-Talk* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 65-71.

<sup>21</sup> J.J. O'Donnell has published a helpful account of the conference: "Augustine in Algeria: 2001," available online at <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/algeria/algeriatrip.html>. See also discussion of the conference in Karla Pollmann, *St Augustine the Algerian* (Göttingen: Duehrkohp & Radicke, 2003).



African, but only in a certain sense. His identity is more complex, entailing “universalité” or at least something non-African, alongside his “Africanité”.

These post-colonial understandings of Augustine provide a horizon from which to read Augustine more closely. This horizon or backdrop that emerges from contexts where post-colonial concerns play a prominent role includes the pattern of seeing Augustine as both African and something other than African. Such a reading of Augustine can be supplemented with the methodology of postcolonial criticism.

### ***Toward a Postcolonial Methodology***

In their work, *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, dubbed postcolonial theory a “reading practice” – distinct from the temporal descriptor “post-colonial.”<sup>22</sup> Postcolonial critics generally trace their roots to Edward Said’s work, *Orientalism*, in which he attacks the “colonial discourse” of the West for alienating the non-western “Other.”<sup>23</sup> More recently, however, postcolonial theorists have relied upon Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak, who asked, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”; Spivak is especially influential in her contention that scholars must speak for those who cannot and for those who inhabit “postcoloniality.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 193.

<sup>23</sup> *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978). Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 2001), 18, attributes Said for having “created the academic field of postcolonialism.” Similarly, see Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, “Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: An Introduction,” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (New York: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1993), 5.

<sup>24</sup> “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), 271-313, reprinted in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1993), 66-111.

Postcoloniality is said to be a social location under colonial oppression, and it should not be limited to the chronological constraints of the European imperialism of the nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> Spivak's emphasis on those forgotten by history, and the need for historians to view history from a perspective other than which has been written by "the winners" coincided with what became known as "People's History" and "history from below." Additionally, according to Robert Young, postcolonial critics insist that "analysts look at texts as texts rather than as documents providing evidence about historical events... suggesting that all knowledge is partial."<sup>26</sup> In other words, a postcolonial approach to history entails reading data through a different set of hermeneutical questions – a reading of historical texts in search of "postcoloniality."

Can postcolonial theory be applied to the Roman empire and to patristic writers? The short answer to this question is yes: it has already been done by a number of Roman historians, and several recent studies by patristic scholars have assumed a postcolonial approach.<sup>27</sup> Whether or not such an approach will become mainstream in these disciplines remains to be seen. As to

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<sup>25</sup> Likewise, Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 3, argues that the "postcolonial condition is inaugurated with the onset rather than the end of colonial occupation."

<sup>26</sup> Young, *Postcolonialism*, 389-92, where the author is criticizing such a view in that it "threatens any notion of history as an objective discipline."

<sup>27</sup> E.g. P.D.A. Garnsey and C.R. Whittaker (eds.), *Imperialism in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); D.J. Mattingly *Dialogues in Roman Imperialism: Power, Discourse, and Discrepant Experience in the Roman Empire* (JRA Supplementary Series 23, 1997); J. Webster and N.J. Cooper (eds.), *Roman Imperialism: Post-colonial Perspectives* (Leicester: 1996); and Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie (eds.), *Classics in a Post-Colonial World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). And for patristic studies generally, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), esp. 181-5; Jeremy M. Schott, *Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), esp. 9-11. Specific studies include Rebecca Lyman, "Hellenism and Heresy," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003): 209-22; Lyman, "The Politics of Passing: Justin Martyr's Conversion as a Problem of 'Hellenization'," in *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing*, ed. K. Mills and A. Grafton (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 36-60; Lyman, "Justin and Hellenism: Some Postcolonial Perspectives," in *Justin Martyr and His Worlds*, ed. Sara Parvis and Paul Foster (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 160-68; and David Wilhite, *Tertullian the African: A Social Anthropological Reading of his Context and Identities* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007).

the specific study of North Africa under Roman rule, however, much work has already been done.<sup>28</sup> Whereas Africa Proconsularis was once assumed to be the most “Romanized” of the provinces, the consensus has now reversed itself entirely so that most scholars view Africa as the breadbasket of the empire which was governed by the Roman legions, but which retained its pre-Roman languages, religions and customs.<sup>29</sup>

One could also question who could write a postcolonial Augustine. In his recent book, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, Thomas Oden challenges Africans in particular to undertake a reading of the ancient Church, mining for African origins from an African perspective in order to retrieve an ancient African Christianity.<sup>30</sup> While there is certainly much to be commended for Oden’s study, there is no need to confine postcolonial readings of the ancient church to post-colonial scholars (something Oden carefully avoids saying).

Over a century ago Hegel claimed that Africa had no history – at least, history according to his definition of progress and Spirit.<sup>31</sup> And it will be no surprise that African writers, philosophers and theologians have harshly critiqued Hegel’s Eurocentricity.<sup>32</sup> To suggest today that only Africans could undertake a postcolonial reading of Augustine, rather than privileging

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<sup>28</sup> The following studies have been the most influential: Laroui, A. *L’histoire du Maghreb: Un Essai de Synthèse*, (Paris: F. Maspero, 1970); Marcel Benabou, M. *La Résistance Africaine à la Romanisation*, (Paris: F. Maspero, 1976); and Paul-Albert Février, *Approches du Maghreb romain: pouvoirs, différences et conflits* (La Calade, Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1989).

<sup>29</sup> See bibliography in Wilhite, *Tertullian*, 4-7 and *passim*.

<sup>30</sup> *How African Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. J. Sibree (New York: P.F. Collier, 1902 [German orig. 1837]), 157.

<sup>32</sup> e.g. V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988).

post-colonial, contemporary Africans, would insult and marginalize them in a Hegelian understanding of being confined both to the same geographic continent and to the same pre-Enlightenment worldview as Augustine. As a reading practice, postcolonial theory is available to anyone, even a westerner, who is willing to undertake such a study.

A final question to be addressed in outlining a postcolonial methodology for reading Augustine is the matter of “evidence.” What would one hope to find in Augustine’s oeuvre that would indicate “postcoloniality”? Postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha has countered the tendency to polarize the scholarly discourse into the binary opposition of “colonizer” and “colonized.”<sup>33</sup> Instead, individuals and groups from postcolonial contexts more often inhabit “alterity and ambivalence.”<sup>34</sup> The resulting understanding of postcoloniality is one where subjects operate from within multiple cultures and identities. An indigenous Indian, for example, under the rule of the British Empire could easily accommodate English language, customs, values and even religion, a state described by colonizers as being “more British than the British,” *while simultaneously* remaining fully Indian in their self-identity, a state described by Bhabha as “hybridity.”<sup>35</sup> Hybridity, it should be noted, is an apt description for the Augustines found by post-colonial scholars in the previous section.

As a starting point for a postcolonial reading of Augustine, scholars can explore aspects of Augustine’s hybridity as an African under Roman rule. With this approach one need not “prove” *an* identity, but employ a reading strategy that appreciates multiple and various aspects

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<sup>33</sup> *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 71-2.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 121-31.

of Augustine's self-portrayal. W.H.C. Frend described the Libyan population of rural Africa in Augustine's day as "almost wholly un-influenced by Roman civilization and often hostile to its representatives."<sup>36</sup> This description certainly does not fit Augustine, nor does it need to in order to describe Augustine as "African" and as "postcolonial."<sup>37</sup> Augustine was not un-influenced, unconcerned or unengaged by *romanitas*; had he been so, that would make him, not postcolonial, but indigenous.<sup>38</sup> Instead, we must look for his "Africanity" along side his Roman identity – or better, a hybridity of the two. The following section, therefore, will offer a few examples where Augustine's African identity comes to the forefront in his writings, assuming that Augustine's acculturation to Rome is already well established in the secondary literature.

### ***Toward a Postcolonial Augustine***

The present study can now turn to a historical and literary analysis of Augustine, and it will do so by applying a postcolonial reading strategy to the relevant sources. Since Augustine's classical education and fluency in Roman culture are both well attested in the scholarly discourse, the current study can focus on Augustine's "Africanity," or indicators of a non-Roman identity. The aim, however, is then to place this African identity into juxtaposition with his Roman identity in order to find a hybridity of the two (as per Bhabha in the previous paragraph).

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<sup>36</sup> "A Note on the Berber Background in the Life of Augustine," *Journal of Theological Studies* 43 (1942), 190.

<sup>37</sup> For a full depiction of Augustine's socio-geographic context, see Othmar Perler and Jean Louis Maier, *Les Voyages de saint Augustin* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1969).

<sup>38</sup> The notion of "Romanization" is now much contested by historians. See the more nuanced understanding of Richard Hingley, *Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire* (London: Routledge, 2005), wherein *romanitas* is pursued by local elites.

In attempting to understand the African context from which Augustine writes, one can begin by considering Augustine's immediate kin. He describes the region of his birth as one where most people speak "Punic," or Libyan, and with only the urban centers knowing Latin.<sup>39</sup> As for his father, Patricius, it is widely noted that Augustine's attention to him pales in comparison with his commentary on his mother. Nevertheless, Patricius from all that can be gathered appears to have been a typical African<sup>40</sup> elite who tried to ascend the status ladder of the Roman social hierarchy, and while he was himself only mildly successful<sup>41</sup> – a member of the local *curia*,<sup>42</sup> he made every effort to capitalize on his social connections and attach his son to the local African patrons better connected with Roman nobility.<sup>43</sup> Such a practice is consistent with earlier African elites, such as Fronto and Apuleius who invoked *hospitii iura* (the rights of friends) in order to further themselves and fellow Africans in Roman society.<sup>44</sup>

Patricius' name may derive, via *interpretatio Romana*, from the African deity known as Liber Pater (i.e. equivalent to Dionysos/Bacchus).<sup>45</sup> If Monnica comes from an indigenous

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<sup>39</sup> For a description of the neighboring villages of Thagaste, see *Ep.* 108.5.14; *Ep.* 209.2-3. For the region surrounding Hippo, see *Ep.* 105.2.3-4, *Ep.* 209.3, and *Ep. Io. ad Parth. tract.* 2.3, where Augustine explains, "they speak Punic, that is, African" [SC 75: "...dicant... punicam, id est, afram."]

<sup>40</sup> J.J. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine: An Introduction to the Confessions of St. Augustine* (London: Longman, 1980), 25, concludes that Patricius was "a native Numidian."

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *Conf.* 2.3.5, for Patricius' class status. Also, in *Serm.* 356.3 Augustine tells of the poor attire provided by his father.

<sup>42</sup> Possidius, *Vita Aug.* 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Contra Acad.* 2.1.3.

<sup>44</sup> J. Gardner and T. Wiedemann, *The Roman Household: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1991), 176; ref. Fronto, *De nepote amisso* 1.3; and Apuleius, *Apologia* 94f.

<sup>45</sup> See J.B. Rives, *Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage: From Augustus to Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 129 and *passim*; and Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Blackwell, 2007), 71-3; and Alain Cadotte, *La romanisation des dieux: l'interpretatio romana en Afrique du Nord sous le Haut-Empire* (Leiden: Brill 2007).

background – and the consensus of scholars now assumes she did, then the very fact that Patricius would marry her suggests that he was not Roman, given the studies of marriage in Roman Africa that have found intermarriage to be rare.<sup>46</sup> Looking through a postcolonial lens, Patricius appears as an African who trained his son to pursue *romanitas*.

Augustine's mother seems to be less a woman of the Roman world, and more an indigenous North African, only her husband and her son have entered into the pursuit of *romanitas*. Augustine once commented on how difficult it would be for her to speak Latin without an accent (*De ord.* 2.17.45; see quotation below), which she apparently never tried to do.<sup>47</sup> This is reminiscent of Septimius Severus, who was the first African emperor and who was embarrassed by his sister's African accent.<sup>48</sup> Rebecca Moore comments, "Monnica's piety and practice seem to reflect the African Christianity that Augustine subsequently tried to replace with catholic, or Romanized, Christianity. ... Although Monnica complied with Caecilianist Christianity – a minority church movement that rejected the Donatists' insistence on the rebaptism of those whose sins required it – she continued her North African traditions until

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<sup>46</sup> O'Meara, *The Young Augustine*, 28. On marriage in North Africa, see especially, David Cherry, "Marriage and Acculturation in Roman Algeria," *Classical Philology* 92 (1 1997) 71-83, where he finds the marriages between "Roman(ized) and un-Romanized" uncommon; and more generally in North Africa, Cherry, *Frontier and Society in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), chapter four, "Husbands and Wives in the Frontier Zone" (pp. 101-40).

<sup>47</sup> For bibliography and discussion of Monnica's role in the Cassiacum dialogues see Laurie Douglass, "Voice Re-Cast: Augustine's Use of Conversion in *De ordine* and the *Confessions*," *Augustinian Studies* 27 (1996): 39-54.

<sup>48</sup> *Scriptores historiae augustae, Seuerus*, 15.7 [LCL: *cum sua Leptitana ad eum uenisset uix Latine loquens, ac de illa multum imperator erubesceret.*] Cf. *SHA, Seu.* 19.9 [LCL: *canorus uoce, sed Afrum quiddam usque ad senectutem sonans.*]

Ambrose admonished her to stop.”<sup>49</sup> Monnica’s apparent Donatism is another helpful aspect of her, and Augustine’s, African identity.<sup>50</sup>

Monnica came from a so-called Donatist background.<sup>51</sup> Given the study of W.H.C. Frend, which claimed a correlation between Donatism and indigenous North African people groups, this ecclesiastical connection further suggests Monnica’s indigenous ethnicity.<sup>52</sup> Augustine himself relays how Monnica retained certain aspects of Christianity that were from “her own local practice.”<sup>53</sup> Even Monnica’s name, which is derived from the Libyan god, Mon, indicates her indigenous background while suggesting no attempt at *interpretatio Romana*.<sup>54</sup> To take account of both of Augustine’s parents, as seen in this postcolonial reading, Patricius signifies Augustine’s new elite identity, striving for *romanitas*, while Monnica signifies a more

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<sup>49</sup> Rebecca Moore, “O Mother, Where art Thou? In Search of Saint Monnica,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, Judith C. Stark (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 159.

<sup>50</sup> On the socio-economic aspects of the Donatist controversy, see Jean-Paul Brisson, *Autonomisme et christianisme dans l’Afrique Romaine de Septime Sévère à l’invasion vandale* (Paris: de Boccard, 1958).

<sup>51</sup> O’Donnell, *Augustine*, 55. See also Augustine’s cousin, Severinus (*ep.* 52), who was Donatist (Frend, “The Family of Augustine: A Microcosm of Religious Change in North Africa,” in *Archaeology and History in the Study of Early Christianity* [London: Variorum, 1988; orig. in *Atti del Congresso internazionale su S. Agostino nel XVI centenario della conversione {Roma, 15-20 settembre 1986} I*, {Studia Ephemeridis “Augustinianum,” 24 Rome, 1987}], 140).

<sup>52</sup> Frend, *The Donatist Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971 [orig. 1952]). See also John A. Rohr, “Religious Toleration in St. Augustine,” *Journal of Church and State* 9 (1 1967): 51-70.

<sup>53</sup> Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 75; ref. *Conf.* 6.2.2.

<sup>54</sup> Frend, *The Donatist Church*, 230.



indigenous identity – taken together, there is a hybridity, to use Bhabha’s terminology, that Augustine will retain throughout his life.<sup>55</sup>

In early adulthood, Augustine took a concubine, whose name he never reported, and to whom he remained devoted until prepared to join the highest circle of Roman nobility in Milan, at which time his unnamed partner of twelve years was sent back to Africa.<sup>56</sup> The son born out of this relationship was named Adeodatus, whose name again suggests a state of hybridity: the name, according to Brown, was an instance of *interpretatio Romana* from the Punic name, Iatanbaal.<sup>57</sup> Brown’s source for this is I. Kajanto’s *Onomastic Studies in the Early Christian Inscriptions of Rome and Carthage*, wherein Kajanto demonstrates the common occurrence of this name. Were Adeodatus to be a translation of the less common yet more literal rendering of Hannibal (Punic = Gift of God; cf. Lat. “Adeodatus”), then even more of an indigenous identity could be inferred in that to name one’s child after the great antagonist of Rome and defender of Carthage would be a blatant display of African pride. If we assumed a pattern from Augustine’s

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<sup>55</sup> This view of Augustine in terms of hybridity, seems more helpful than strictly seeing Augustine as a “Berber” (e.g. René Pottier, *Saint Augustin le Berbère*, [Paris 1945]). See Mark Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine: His Context and Pastoral Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 8, who perceives a consensus of scholars now agreeing that Augustine was “of mixed racial background.” André Mandouze, “Cloture de la session d’Alger,” in *Augustinus Afer: saint Augustin, africanité et universalité*, ed. Pierre-Yves Fux, Jean-Michel Roessli, Otto Wermelinger (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 2003), 386, notes this aspect of Augustine to say, “Une généalogie qui est en fait la typique représentation d’une africanité plurielle fondée sur le métissage le plus complet et le plus représentatif qu’on puisse espérer.” As to why Augustine later converted to Caecelianist/Catholic Christianity, as opposed to Donatist, Frend, “The Family of Augustine,” 150, concludes, “Donatism involved a break with the intellectual pagan heritage and the substitution of the Bible for the Classics. ... Both Manichaeism and Catholicism in North Africa expressed a greater degree of continuity with the pagan-classical past, and were vastly more attractive to Augustine and his friends.” Similarly, O’Donnell, *Augustine*, 49, suggests that Augustine embraced Catholicism after his encounter with Faustus: “The Manichee Faustus, originally from Milevis, was what Augustine could have become; a well-educated man who fell among the Manichees and knew success among them and scorn everywhere else.”

<sup>56</sup> *Conf.* 6.15.25.

<sup>57</sup> Brown, *Augustine* (1967), 63. However, Frend, “The Family of Augustine,” 150, simply reads this as a Christian appellation. What, precisely, is “Christ-centred” about the name, Frend does not explain.

parents to his common law marriage, then Adeodatus is a name given to suit both the mother's indigenous sympathies and Augustine's pursuit of *romanitas*. In his early work *De magistro*, Augustine relates how he and Adeodatus both spoke Punic, but not as well as others (13.44). Perhaps, both of them learned Punic from their mothers, who continued to speak the indigenous language to their sons, despite their fathers' preference for the Roman language.

Given the postcolonial context of Augustine's upbringing and place of writing, and given both his indigenous and his Romanized parentage and familial relations, we can now ask how his contemporaries might have viewed him. To answer this, we turn to a few instances where Augustine's opponents accuse him of African barbarism, and then turn to Augustine's own self-understanding as an African.

### ***Accused of Africanity***

Around 404, in a famous correspondence, Augustine presses Jerome to explain his preference of the Hebrew text over the Septuagint, Jerome curtly responds that he does not wish to enter into further discussion. Jerome likens himself to a retired veteran who prefers a life of quietude; he then warns, "If, however, you assiduously hammer me to engage, then I remind you of that historical event where Quintus Maximus in his patience shattered Hannibal in his youthful pride."<sup>58</sup> By likening Augustine to Hannibal who was defeated by Quintus Maximus (i.e. Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus Cunctator), Jerome evokes the Punic wars and Africa's

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<sup>58</sup> Aug., *Ep.* 72.3 [CSEL 34.1: "*ne, si me ad scribendum frequenter inpuleris, illius recorder historiae, quod Hannibalem iuueniliter exultantem Quintus Maximus patientia sua fregerit*"]; ref. Livy 22.12-8. cf. *Ep.* 75.4.18 where Jerome refers to Augustine's congregation as an "ignorant commoners" [CSEL 34.1: *inperitorum plebeculam*]. Is Jerome attacking Augustine's flock for being provincial? Note: all translations are the author's, unless otherwise noted.

tragic hero, in effect demarcating Augustine as an over-zealous African. Augustine does not explicitly address Jerome's allusion, but the rhetorical point would certainly not have been missed, especially since Augustine had earlier written to Jerome explicitly speaking on behalf of "all the African churches."<sup>59</sup>

In a less famous exchange between Augustine and Secundinus the Manichaean the two exchange typical rhetorical jabs. Secundinus, who styles himself a "Roman," attacks Augustine's "Punic" ancestry and – like Jerome – calls Augustine "Hannibal."<sup>60</sup> Later, during the Pelagian controversy Julian of Eclanum in a fit of "nationalist, if not racist" polemics contends that Augustine has imposed a peculiarly African teaching on the catholic church.<sup>61</sup> In so doing, Julian accuses Augustine of both "Numidian stubbornness" and "Punic reasonings," and he therefore labels Augustine "the Punic Aristotle."<sup>62</sup> Augustine delays direct response to ethnic/provincialist demarcation until late in book six, and then his strategy is to embrace the descriptor only so he can immediately extend the designation "Punic" to other fathers whom Julian would have not been able to dismiss:

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<sup>59</sup> *Ep.* 28.2 [CSEL 34.1: "omnis Africanarum ecclesiarum."]

<sup>60</sup> Secundinus, *Ep.* 2, claims Augustine belongs to the Punic peoples [PL 42:col.0573: "*Punicae gentes*"], and in *Ep.* 3, Augustine is again attacked for his Punic ties [PL 42:col.0574: "*Quis Punicum salvabit? ...te Hannibalem.*"] Augustine counters Secundinus' claim to *romanitas* in a mocking tone (*Contra Sec.* 19 [PL 42:col. 0594]) and addresses the Punic question by shifting from a geographical to a theological matter (*Contra Sec.* 25 [PL 42:col.0600]).

<sup>61</sup> For further discussion of this exchange, see M. Lamberigts, "The Italian Julian of Aeclanum about the African Augustine of Hippo," in *Augustinus Afer*, 83-93.

<sup>62</sup> apud Aug., *Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum* 1.16 [CSEL 85.1: "*Numidae induruisse*"]; 1.72 [*"Punicae dialexeos"*]; and 3.199 [*"Aristoteles Poenorum"*]. On Julian's "nationalist..." polemics, see Josef Lössl, "Augustine, 'Pelagianism,' Julian of Aeclanum and Modern Scholarship," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 11, no. 1 (2007): 143.

Wish not to disparage this “Punic.” ...Even given the fact that Italy birthed you, it still remains that you think the Punics are bested by your blood-line, when in reality they have not been bested by your brain-power. Flee not the “Punic” but the penal. For you cannot avoid Punic respondents so long as you adore your own power. After all, even the blessed Cyprian was Punic.<sup>63</sup>

In responding to Julianus’ charge of provincialism, Augustine echoes earlier African elites who could not deny their African *patria* and so instead rhetorically appealed to so-called barbarians such as Anacharsis the Scythian who, the Africans Fronto (*Epistula ad M. Caesarem* 5) and Apuleius (*Apologia* 24) both insisted, was wiser than the Greeks. The practice of labeling Augustine “Punic” or African, however, is not limited to Augustine’s opponents.

Around 428 fellow African and soon to be Bishop of Carthage, Quodvultdeus, requests Augustine’s instructions, which he poetically calls, “African bread isolated from any foreign flavors.”<sup>64</sup> Quodvultdeus’ imagery alludes to the fact that Africa had become the breadbasket of the Roman Empire. One of the leading studies of this phenomenon is that of T.R.S. Broughton, who argues, “The capitalistic agricultural exploitation which was a feature of the Roman regime from the beginning at first made Africa famous for her glorious harvests, but ended in the

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<sup>63</sup> *C. Iul.* 6.18 [CSEL 85.2: “*Noli istum Poenum ...spernere. Non enim quia te Apulia genuit, ideo Poenos uincendos existimes gente, quos non potes mente. Poenas potius fuge, non Poenos; nam disputatores Poenos non potes fugere, quamdiu te delectat in tua virtute confidere, et beatus enim Cyprianus Poenus fuit*”]; cf. 6.23. Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine*, 10, concludes, “Thus we can authoritatively rule out the possibility of his having an Italian ethnic background. ...Is it not time for the academic community in general to take a hard look at the possibility of Augustine’s ethnic Berber background and how that might affect the way that we interpret him?” While the present study largely agrees with Ellingsen, a more nuanced understanding of hybridity need not exclude any “Italian ethnic background,” and the concept of hybridity can more easily accommodate both the traditional understanding of the Roman Augustine (which Ellingsen seeks to counterbalance) as well as the African Augustine evident in statements of his such as that cited here (which Ellingsen seeks to underscore [cf. *The Richness of Augustine*, 2]).

<sup>64</sup> *Ep.* 223.3 [CSEL 57: “*sequestratis saporibus peregrinis... panem Afrum.*”]

production of a society of unprivileged serfs.”<sup>65</sup> Quodvultdeus’ request for “African bread” that remains in Africa is meant to be complimentary to Augustine, because Augustine’s fellow Africans desire this bread “pure of any foreign [= Roman?] flavors.”

These examples suffice to demonstrate that Augustine was perceived, by at least some, to be African of Punic or Libyan descent. To be sure, many others – probably including Augustine himself – perceived Augustine in more strictly Roman terms. Within the limited scope of this article, however, those instances have been left to other studies. The two identities, however, indicate a set of various and perhaps even conflicting identities expected in a state of postcoloniality (as per Spivak above). The analysis can now turn to Augustine’s own self-portrayal.

### *Augustine’s own “Africanisms”*<sup>66</sup>

Because Augustine’s Roman, or at least Romanized, nature has been traditionally emphasized and can now be assumed, the following examples from Augustine’s works will consist of instances where he exhibits an African self-identity. In terms of Said’s *Orientalism* (see above) this is an attempt to see Augustine as a non-westerner, an “Other.”

Early in Augustine’s writing career he published what are known as the Cassiciacum dialogues. In his treatise on providence Augustine admitted that he spoke Latin with an accent, a

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<sup>65</sup> *The Romanization of Africa* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1929), 227. For more recent studies that corroborate Broughton’s views, see Cherry, *Frontier and Society in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

<sup>66</sup> “Africanism” is a term coined by G.W. Clark, *The Octavius of Marcus Minucius Felix* (New York: Newman Press, 1974), to describe certain elements in the writing of the earlier African Christian writers, Tertullian and Minucius Felix.

habit which “annoyed the Italians.”<sup>67</sup> Given his statement in the *Confessions* (1.14.23), Latin was Augustine’s first language, and yet his admission that he spoke the *lingua Romana* with a provincial, if not African, accent is reminiscent of Apuleius in the second century.<sup>68</sup> In defining his speech as one free from barbarisms, Apuleius stated, “For who among you would forgive me for a single solecism? Who would allow me one ignorantly pronounced syllable? Who would permit me to jabber any wild and uncouth words like those that well up in the mouth of the insane?”<sup>69</sup> The new elite of Africa struggled to transcend their Africanity and to assume *romanitas*, which required their speech to be, in the words of O’Donnell, “more Roman than the Romans.”<sup>70</sup> O’Donnell here echoes the common phrase in postcolonial discussions wherein one is said to be “more English than the English.”<sup>71</sup>

Another aspect of Augustine’s early life, recounted in his *Confessiones* (1.8.20), is how he was trained in his schooling to weep about the story of Dido and Aeneas. (Let the reader understand Dido to be the pre-Roman queen of Carthage and Aeneas the progenitor of Rome).<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *De ordin.* 2.17.45 [CCSL 29: “*Itali exagitant.*”] Also see discussion in Peter Brown, “Christianity and Local Culture in Late Roman Africa,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 58 (1968): 85-95.

<sup>68</sup> For text and commentary of Augustine’s *Confessiones*, see O’Donnell’s three volumes: *Confessions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), which is now conveniently available online at <http://www.stoa.org/hippo/>.

<sup>69</sup> *Florida* 9.6-7, “*Quis enim uestrum mihi unum soloecismum ignouerit? Quis uel unam syllabam barbaram pronuntiatam donauerit? Quis incondita et uitiosa uerba temere quasi delirantibus oborientia permiserit blaterare?*” (Text.: *Apulée: Apologie, Florides*, in Collection des universités de France, ed. Paul Vallette; trans.: John Hilton, *Apuleius: Rhetorical Works*. ed. Stephen J. Harrison, [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001]). See Hilton, “Introduction,” in *Apuleius*, ed. Harrison, 126, for Apuleius’ first language being Punic.

<sup>70</sup> O’Donnell, *Augustine*, (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985), 2, in his chapter entitled, “Augustine the African.” See also Mandouze, “Clôture de la session d’Alger,” in *Augustinus Afer*, 386, who claims that Augustine on occasion acted “plus romain que les Romains.”

<sup>71</sup> See Aschroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 4

<sup>72</sup> For bibliography on Dido, see Sabine MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry: Vergil in the Mind of Augustine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 17 n.59.

Brown calls this tale “a very African interlude in the life of the upright founder of Rome.”<sup>73</sup> Similarly, regarding the account in the *Confessiones* where Augustine forsook his mother in Carthage and sailed to Rome, O’Donnell interprets Augustine’s jilting of Monica under the Aeneas/Dido motif: “The most remarkable scene, as she weeps on the shore at Carthage while her son sails off, abandoning her for Italy, is dramatically inscribed into the literary tradition, with Augustine suddenly becoming Aeneas abandoning Dido. We can all connect the dots of that story.”<sup>74</sup> If we follow O’Donnell’s “connecting of the dots”, then the young Aeneas-like Augustine who pursues a career as a rhetor in Rome must do so by forsaking his African mother/-land in pursuit of *romanitas*. This story again fits into a postcolonial reading wherein no identity (African or otherwise) can be essentialized, but the conflicting selves and competing loyalties are held in tension.

Augustine’s pursuit of *romanitas*, however, is either abandoned after his conversion experience in Milan, or was never so totalizing as to negate an appreciation for his homeland. For in responding to Maximus of Madaura (c. 390), who had denigrated the indigenous heritage of North Africa, Augustine insists,

As an African man, writing to Africans, and even as one abiding in Africa, you could not have forgotten yourself and thought of Punic names as flawed. ... Should this language be disapproved by you, you must deny that in Punic books produced by very educated men many wise teachings have been recorded; you must regret that you were born here, for this land is the still-warm cradle of the

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<sup>73</sup> Augustine, 23.

<sup>74</sup> Augustine, 55.

Punic language itself. ... You disrespect and snub Punic names to such an extent, it is as if you had surrendered to the Roman altars.<sup>75</sup>

Not only has Augustine chastised Maximus' betrayal of his *punicitas*, he shrewdly counters these sentiments by deeming them "Roman," apparently the unspoken motivation behind Maximus' words.

Around the same time and in a friendlier letter, Augustine encourages Bishop Aurelius of Carthage. Through their joint labor, Augustine prays, God may heal "the African church."<sup>76</sup> Augustine must also explain to Aurelius how the current bishop of Hippo is not indigenous to the region, but "even if he were African," he could be no more effective because of his prudence.<sup>77</sup>

Around 412, in answering concerns raised by Marcellinus, a magistrate in Carthage to whom the first book of *De ciuitate Dei* would be dedicated, Augustine addresses the comparison of Christ with other magicians, such as Apollonius and Apuleius. Augustine retorts, "It is best to speak of Apuleius, who is known as an African among us Africans."<sup>78</sup> After embracing this African identity shared by all three men (i.e. Augustine, Marcellinus, and Apuleius), Augustine touches upon the embarrassing failure of Apuleius' attempt to transcend his Africanity and attain the prestige of *romanitas*:

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<sup>75</sup> Ep. 17.2 [CSEL 34.1: *neque enim usque adeo teipsum obliuisci potuisses, ut homo Afer scribens Afris, cum simus utrique in Africa constituti, Punica nomina exagitanda existimares. ... quae lingua si inprobatur abs te, nega Punicis libris, ut a uiris doctissimis proditur; multa sapienter esse mandata memoriae; paeniteat te certe ibi natum, ubi huius linguae cunabula recalent. ... et tamen Punica nomina tamquam nimium Romanorum altaribus deditus contemnis ac despicias.*]

<sup>76</sup> Ep. 22.2 [CSEL 34.1: "*Africana ecclesia.*"] F.L. Cross, "History and Fiction in the African Canons," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 12 (1961), 229, reads this statement as evidence of Augustine's own hopes of revivifying the church throughout Numidia.

<sup>77</sup> Ep. 22.4 [CSEL 34.1: "*etiam si Afer esset*"].

<sup>78</sup> Ep. 138.4.19 [CSEL 44: "*Apuleius enim, ut de illo potissimum loquamur, qui nobis Afris Afer est notior.*"]



Not only did [Apuleius] never attain a governorship, he never even attained any sort of powerful public office, despite all his magical arts, his noble birth place, higher education, and being gifted with great eloquence.<sup>79</sup>

Although Augustine also acknowledges in this same paragraph that Apuleius was the “priest of the [African] province” (*sacerdos prouinciae*), Augustine nevertheless mocks Apuleius’ failed attempt to attain a prestigious governmental office in the Roman empire, a mockery which arises only after the fall of Rome at a time when Augustine begins to formulate his Two Cities paradigm that would soon become his *magnum opus* – more will be said on this below.<sup>80</sup>

Late in his career, Augustine exchanged letters with Hesychius, the Metropolitan of Dalmatia.<sup>81</sup> Hesychius had assumed that the end of the world was imminent because “the Gospel of Christ has infiltrated every place.”<sup>82</sup> The vehicle for this spreading of the Gospel Hesychius names as the Roman Empire, a common assumption since Eusebius. Augustine responds with a lengthy letter refuting Hesychius’ assumptions, especially that made about Rome. First, Augustine knows that the Gospel has not been preached “everywhere”: “For among us here in Africa there are uncounted barbarian nations among whom the Gospel is still yet to be

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid [*non dico ad regnum sed ne ad aliquam quidem iudiciarum rei publicae potestatem cum omnibus suis magicis aribus potuit peruenire honesto patriae suae loco natus et liberaliter educatus magnaue praeditus eloquentia*]. The reference to Apuleius’ *honesto patriae suae loco natus*, Madaurus, is probably a rhetorical play on words: Apuleius’ social location by birth was prestigious, but his geographical place of birth, while provincial, is the same region that Augustine is from and which the recipient of this letter governs (see S.J. Harrison, *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 1-6).

<sup>80</sup> Earlier in this letter (*ep.* 138.3.16-17) Augustine answers those who blame Christians for the fall of Rome. Just prior to his discussion of Apuleius (138.4.18), Augustine issues a vitriolic attack on Roman religion in particular, as opposed to “pagan” religion in general.

<sup>81</sup> *Epp.* 197, 198, and 199, the dating of which belongs somewhere between 419 (cf. *ep.* 197) and 427 (cf. *civ. Dei* 20.5.4).

<sup>82</sup> 198.6 [CSEL 57: “*ubique ...euangelium Christi pentrauit.*”]

preached.”<sup>83</sup> Augustine’s *apud nos*, or “among us,” is explicitly “us Africans,” and his self-identity arises in direct response to the Dalmatian bishop’s claim about the Roman Empire, about which Augustine remarks, “For the Lord swore an oath to Abraham that all nations, not just the Romans, would be of his seed.”<sup>84</sup> It is also worth noting that in this same paragraph, Augustine broaches the twin subjects of the Roman slave trade in and subjugation of the African province – a problem he also addressed in one of the more recently discovered Divjak letters (10\*.2).<sup>85</sup>

Late in Augustine’s career (the date of the letter is uncertain, possibly 428), he wrote to a friend of his residing in Italy. Therein, he reports, “There are so many (who in common lingo are called) slave peddlers, that they are depleting the greater part of our population and even a large number of our freeborn, exporting those who are sold into provinces across the Mediterranean.”<sup>86</sup> Augustine’s concern is explicitly “that Africa is not completely emptied of its own natives.”<sup>87</sup> Augustine in this example at no point refers to himself as an African or as a native, yet his sympathy with the indigenous population and his frustration with the trade laws of

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<sup>83</sup> *Ep.* 199.46 [CSEL 57: “*sunt enim apud nos, hoc est in Africa barbarae innumerabiles gentes, in quibus nondum esse pradicatum euangelium ex his.*”]

<sup>84</sup> *Ep.* 199.47 [CSEL 57: “*Non enim Romanos sed omnes gentes dominus semini Abrahae media quoque iuratione promisit*”]; ref. Gen. 22:16-18; 26:3-4.

<sup>85</sup> For Johannes Divjak discovery, authentication, and publication of the letters, see CSEL 88 (1981); as well as the *Bibliothèque Augustiniennes* 46 B (1987). For the implication of these letters for Augustinian studies, see Frend, “The Divjak Letters: New Light on St. Augustine’s Problems, 416-428,” in *Archaeology and History in the Study of Early Christianity*; orig. *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 34 (1983), 497-512.

<sup>86</sup> *Ep.* 10\*.2 [CSEL 87: “*Tanta est eorum qui uulgo mangones uocantur in Africa multitudo, ut eam ex magna parte humano genere exhauriant transferendo quos mercantur in prouincias transmarinas et paene omnes liberos.*”]

<sup>87</sup> *Ep.* 10\*.5 [CSEL 87: “*ut Africa suis non amplius euacuetur indigenis.*”] The Roman/African binary opposition is not so clear cut, however, because Augustine can still speak of the “barbarians,” by whom he may mean the Circumcellions, whose marauding is less of a threat, given the Roman armies. cf. Augustine, *ep.* 220. For a pre-Christian example of such identity politics, see Eirean Marshall, “The Self and the Other in Cyrenaica,” in *Cultural Identity*, ed. Laurence and Berry, 49-63, argues that Cyrenians, who described themselves as Libyans, portrayed the desert Libyans as “barbaric” as a means of constructing their own “civilized” identity.

the empire is evident in his hope that Alypius will sway the imperial court to take action on behalf of Africans.

While these examples all require further attention to contextual concerns, they do help the postcolonial understanding of Augustine in that he clearly has some self-understanding as an African. While such a conclusion may seem trivial, the point needs to be clarified in Augustinian scholarship that has not yet come to terms with Augustine's African heritage. Gerald Bonner, for example, devotes considerable attention to Augustine's ethnicity (which he calls "race"), and concludes, "In determining a man's race, culture is a more significant factor than blood; and nowhere do we find Augustine thinking of himself as anything other than a Latin-speaking Roman."<sup>88</sup> This statement is especially bewildering since the examples provided here exhibit multiple instances of "Augustine thinking of himself as...other than a Latin-speaking Roman."

In a similar vein of thought, Johannes van Oort, after reviewing the evidence suggesting that Augustine's parents were of Berber descent, asserts, "Yet all of this does not tell us very much. Even if Augustine's mother and perhaps also Patricius were Berbers, it is still true that they manifested themselves in a typically Roman fashion. ...[Augustine] belongs to the West European cultural sphere."<sup>89</sup> The picture, however, is not so simple, for van Oort next qualifies his understanding of Augustine to admit that "his writings display an unmistakably African chauvinism."<sup>90</sup> These two natures van Oort perceives in Augustine correspond with Bhabha's concept of hybridity, the only difference being that scholars such as Bonner and van Oort seem

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<sup>88</sup> *Augustine* (2002), 32.

<sup>89</sup> *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 19.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 20. Van Oort also stipulates, "In short, he was a civilized African as we can imagine one to be in the Late Roman period" (21). What an "uncivilized African" would have looked like, van Oort leaves undefined.

eager to avert any attention from Augustine's Africanity, whereas the authors from a post-colonial context (surveyed in the earlier section of this article) are eager to underscore it.

One instance of this Roman/African tension in Augustine that van Oort does acknowledge is in *De ciuitate Dei*: "This work, so influential in world history, was written by a Roman from Africa. Was his attitude towards the Empire different from that of its citizens elsewhere? Could there have been in him the same permeating element of hostility towards Rome that was undeniably present among Berbers and Phoenicians? These questions merit further consideration."<sup>91</sup> The need for "further consideration" is one that can especially be undertaken by a postcolonial reading of *De ciuitate Dei*, to which we may now briefly turn.<sup>92</sup>

### ***The African City of God***

In his rereading of Augustine's view of the Roman Empire, Robert Markus finds the bishop rejecting the triumphalist stance of Eusebius and others, and yet Markus admits that Augustine continued to solicit government help for religious coercion. On these seemingly contradictory points, Markus supposes, "It could be that at this point Augustine's mind appears like one of those drawings which can be read in two alternative ways, according to the way one looks at them. If so, it has at least been worth attempting to look at Augustine's theology from a

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<sup>91</sup> See the statement in Van Oort, *Jerusalem and Babylon*, 21.

<sup>92</sup> Van Oort's reading of *ciu. Dei* is not intended to be postcolonial. He only returns to Augustine's African perspective by way of surveying his "African sources" (*Jerusalem and Babylon*, 254-273, 284-300). In his "Final Remarks" van Oort states, "All this explains why the character of African Christianity was dissenting in many ways. Jewish exclusiveness joined with Semitic-Punic and Berber particularism, and thus a movement like Donatism, constantly in protest against Rome and its empire, can be more clearly understood. In this way fundamental characteristics of the African Church, and of the Western Church in general, can also be accounted for, such as its legalism" (p. 370). Van Oort's analysis of this particular issues leaves much unanswered.

point of view not often adopted, to see what sort of sense it makes considered as a critique of the ‘establishment’ of the Church in the Roman Empire.”<sup>93</sup> Markus then attempts to dismiss any “tension” in Augustine’s mind and demonstrate how both positions harmonize in the bishop’s theology of the *saeculum*.

Markus’ harmonization, however, is no longer necessary in light of the many Augustines of history. One can now understand Augustine’s postcolonial position as one that rejects Rome as integral to salvation history, and one that can justify the use of force against the indigenous plebs who are like children in need of *disciplina*.<sup>94</sup> Both views can be seen as indicative of postcoloniality and hybridity, wherein Augustine the African retains a critical distance from Rome, especially after its fall and after the currency of *romanitas* has significantly weakened, and Augustine the Roman can summon the powers of the empire to coerce the stubborn schismatics who tend to consist of Donatist “barbarians.” A full rereading of *De ciuitate Dei* which accepts Markus’ understanding of Augustine’s view of Rome, yet which exercises closer attention to the Roman/African relationship in Augustine’s rhetoric will prove beneficial and yet it is beyond the scope of what this article can accomplish with limited space.<sup>95</sup> What follows are initial observations.

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<sup>93</sup> *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 134.

<sup>94</sup> See Anthony J. Chvala-Smith, “Augustine of Hippo,” in *Empire and the Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians*, ed. Kwok Pui-lan, Don H. Compier, and Joerg Rieger (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 79-93, who, according to the collection’s cover, offers a “rereading” in light of “broadly postmodern and postcolonial” concerns; Chvala-Smith finds Augustine’s conflicting stances to reflect a singular rejection of divine claims for the Roman empire.

<sup>95</sup> Another helpful work that analyzes Augustine’s endorsement of forced conversion is Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

One example from Augustine's discussion of Roman imperialism is in book nineteen. During a discussion of the supposed necessity of wars, Augustine launches into what seems to be an unrelated tirade on Rome: "the imperious city has imposed not only a yoke but its language upon the subjugated nations as a societal peace... but this has come about by copious and extensive wars."<sup>96</sup> Roland H. Bainton comments on this passage to say, "Augustine was an African with a deep sense of the wrongs of the conquered."<sup>97</sup> Augustine attacks the so-called civilizing mission of Rome, which had been celebrated by Roman writers, but which the African bishop finds unjustifiable.<sup>98</sup> Thus far in this work Augustine has avoided direct conflict with the fallen city, only casually inserting his African perspective into the discussion, such as when he uses "Africa" as a synonym for "south," (e.g. 16.21; 16.38), and only occasionally betraying pro-African sentiments, such as when he complains about the Roman sources for the Punic war, that is, "[Writers] who did not so much recount the Roman wars as they praised Roman imperialism."<sup>99</sup>

Throughout the work, however, Augustine aggressively denigrates the traditional heroes of Rome; the following list is a veritable who's-who of Rome's glorious past, yet in Augustine's treatment these individuals are sardonically maligned. The "she-wolf" that suckled Romulus and

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<sup>96</sup> 19.7 [CCL 48: "*ut imperiosa ciuitas non solum iugum, uerum etiam linguam suam domitis gentibus per pacem societatis inponeret... sed hoc quam multis et quam grandibus bellis.*"]

<sup>97</sup> *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-evaluation* (New York: Abingdon, 1960), 91, and see 96. In his next sentence Bainton – without using the term 'hybridity' – notes how Augustine "was at the same time a Roman, speaking Latin not Punic."

<sup>98</sup> Examples of Roman writers include Pliny, *Nat. hist.* 3.5.39-40 and Virgil, *Aen.* 6.851-53. For further discussion on this motif, see Richard Hingley, *Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire* (London: Routledge, 2005), 49-71; and the various essays in Craig B. Champion (ed.), *Roman Imperialism: Readings and Sources* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

<sup>99</sup> 3.19 [CCL 47: "*qui non tam narrare bella Romana quam Romanum imperium laudare*"].

Remus was a euphemism for a prostitute (18.21). Aeneas' mother was an adulteress (3.3). And Lucretia – the virgin whose chastity founded the Roman Republic – is said to have actually enjoyed her rape by the Roman prince, Sextus Tarquinius (1.19).<sup>100</sup> On this point of Augustine's rhetoric, Brown comments, "[To Romans,] "the *controversia*, in which he piles on innuendoes against the chastity of Lucretia, would have appeared in singularly bad taste."<sup>101</sup> Additionally, Augustine mocks the death of Regulus (*ciu. Dei* 3.20; cf. 1.15; 1.24), who by all Roman accounts was a pious patriot who died for Rome's security. Scipio Africanus, whose title was awarded for defeating the Carthaginians, and whose era is celebrated by Sallust as the golden age of Rome, is sarcastically referred to by Augustine as "the great," and is mocked for his late-life exile from Rome, the irony of which is itself too great for Augustine to pass over in silence (3.21).<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Caesar Augustus, celebrated by Virgil as the pinnacle of Rome's history, where it is said that he was destined by the fates to rule the world, is said by Augustine "to have stolen all freedom from the Romans."<sup>103</sup> These examples of Augustine's anti-Roman sentiment require more analysis than time allows here. Nevertheless, they illustrate how a rereading of Augustine's works through a postcolonial lens is possible and promising.

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<sup>100</sup> See Livy 1.57-60. cf. Cicero, *Rep.* 2.46; *Fin.* 2.66. For full review of primary sources, ancient rhetorical uses, and Augustine's treatment, see Dennis Trout, "Re-Textualizing Lucretia: Cultural Subversion in the City of God," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1 1994): 53-70.

<sup>101</sup> *Augustine*, 309.

<sup>102</sup> These last two points go unnoticed by Theodore S. de Bruyn, "Jerusalem versus Rome: The Religious and Philosophical Context of Augustine's Assessment of the Roman Empire in the *City of God*," in *Christianity and the Classics: The Acceptance of a Heritage*, ed. Wendy E. Helleman (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 59.

<sup>103</sup> *ciu. Dei* 3.21 [CCL 47: "*libertatem omni modo extorsisse Romanis.*"] It is also worth noting that in this paragraph, Augustine in effect blames the fall of Rome on Rome's cruel victory over Carthage in the Punic wars.

## *Post-Postcolonial Readings*

In 1987 W.H.C. Frend concluded his article on Augustine's family with a call for additional research into his background: "One would welcome some attempt to assess Augustine's importance as an African in the history of North Africa, and to consider his thought in light of his Berber background. How far do Augustine's ideas show traces of the Berber surroundings in which he grew up?"<sup>104</sup> Perhaps, it is time Augustine scholars return to Frend's request; perhaps it is time to move toward a postcolonial Augustine.<sup>105</sup>

On the other hand, the glaring weakness with a postcolonial reading of Augustine is that the reading lens begs for further focus. The "history from below," or "People's history," is a much needed correction in the discipline of historical studies. And yet, simply claiming to be reading/writing "from below" without further definition of what one is looking for allows for too many unexamined assumptions – assumptions which may be more from an "above" perspective than a People's History scholar would care to admit.<sup>106</sup> In other words, the answer given in this article's first section to the question "Who can write a Postcolonial Augustine?" may be appropriate in the sense that westerners can appropriate new heuristic lenses, yet in another sense westerners are still westerners (and a majority of western scholars are still white, upper middle

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<sup>104</sup> Frend, "A Note," 190.

<sup>105</sup> For similar concerns with Augustine's westernization, see the works of Mandouze, esp. his lecture printed in Fux, Roessli, Wermelinger, and von Graffenried (eds.), *Augustinus Afer*, cited above.

<sup>106</sup> See for example the article by George Heffernan, "Augustine of Africa: Contemporary Lessons from his Postcolonial Struggle against Roman Imperialism and Donatist Fundamentalism," *International Journal of the Humanities* 4 (10 2007): 73-87, which offers little to no postcolonial reading of Augustine, but instead offers commentary on neocolonial Algeria and the American war in Iraq, all of which is meant to counter (unnamed) "deconstructionist readings."



class, male scholars), whose appropriation of the from-below lens may do little to alter their thinking and analysis.

For a way past what seems to be cultural entrapment it is suggested here that scholars embrace the dilemma via a further radicalization of what we mean by a postcolonial reading. To follow Bryant-Baker's reading of O'Donnell's impact on our discipline (cited in the introduction) we should recognize that as O'Donnell has exchanged *the* Augustine for manifold Augustines, so we should abandon the hope for *a* postcolonial Augustine from the start, and instead attempt to write the many postcolonial Augustines. Rather than even hoping to move "toward a Postcolonial Augustine," one can move "beyond" *a* postcolonial Augustine. A "post-" postcolonial reading.

This starting point both acknowledges western bias and allows one to move beyond it by requiring a methodological confession as prerequisite to analytical reading. If scholars were to appropriate, not just ill-defined "history-from-below" approaches (of which this author favors *in* theory), but clearly articulated and interdisciplinary informed paradigms, the results will be less subject to unstated "from-above" assumptions. Biblical studies departments have taken this approach for decades now under labels such as social-scientific criticism. Patristic studies have also begun to take the Linguistic Turn in recent years with fruitful results. If Augustinian scholars were to take up a postcolonial reading that was supplemented with theories from cultural anthropology, such as ethnicity theory, kinship construction, class analysis, etc., more concrete material could be studied and more specified results could be produced.

Admittedly, such approaches will be less dramatic, focusing more on minutiae and less on overarching narratives. Yet, this is precisely the role of historical theology in general and patristic studies in particular. In so doing, future work will move “beyond” and not just “toward” a postcolonial Augustine: a post-postcolonial Augustine. To do so, however, a preliminary step is to embrace a postcolonial reading that appreciates both the Augustine who pursues *romanitas* and Augustine the African.