



A hermeneutic of vulnerability: Redeeming Cain?

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Abstract

This article inquires about the appropriation of Cain within a critical South African whiteness. The main argument is that despite Cain's wrongdoing and punishment, he succeeded in living a fruitful life. The idea of the appropriation of Cain is based upon ideas expressed by Katharina von Kellenbach in her book, *The Mark of Cain*. The article looks at the story in terms of a hermeneutic of vulnerability. It starts with the notion of the decolonial turn and its delinking programme, followed by the exploring of the issue of vulnerability as illustrated by three recent incidents in South Africa as reported by some newspapers. It then proceeds to an analysis of Cain's story, starting with early Christian interpretations in terms of fratricide, typology and association with the Jews, followed by two brief references of liberationist readings of Cain before explaining Von Kellenbach's utilisation of the story. Finally, the article presents a reading of Cain that more or less provide some redemption for the character before drawing consequences for reading the story from the position of critical whiteness.

Keywords

Racism, decoloniality, Genesis 4, Cain, vulnerability

1. Introduction

When the wheels of justice turn and one finds oneself on the wrong side, is there any redemption? For example, in the prophecy of Obadiah, Edom is condemned to the point of annihilation in the prophecy of Obadiah. There is apparently no redemption for Edom. Redemption is reserved for Judah.

Cain received through the ages a similar treatment.¹ Robert Hayward illustrates the fate of Cain and the lack of any redemption for his character

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in the early history of interpretation, starting with the LXX.² In the LXX Cain is depicted as selfish and deliberately flouting God's command of keeping silent. Philo regards Cain's character as seriously flawed. He turns Cain into an atheist and refers to his fratricide several times. The Wisdom of Solomon sees Cain as unjust, for example in 10:3 Cain is labelled unrighteous on the basis of his fratricide. The New Testament sees Cain as a teacher of falsehood. 1 John 3:12 depicts Cain as unrighteous and a murderer. Judas 11 condemns those who walk in Cain's way. Josephus sees Cain as greedy, scheming and gross. He portrays Cain's fratricide as extremely wicked; his punishment enabling him to become malicious and depraved. The Church Fathers regard Cain's soul as having the wrong disposition and see him as a teacher of error. Some Church fathers even consider Cain as a prototype of hatred and the devil's heir. In the Jewish interpretative tradition, for example the rabbinical sources, the gaps in the Masoretic text become a theological opportunity to reveal character traits of Cain and Abel. Thus Abel turns out to be the protector of faith and doctrine and Cain a greedy man seeking to gain more.³

In a post-apartheid context where a particular group of people currently experiences a crucible because of their complicity with apartheid, the question is whether such a group can be rehabilitated in the face of the black other who still bear the marks of apartheid as well as of colonialism in terms of a coloniality of being, of knowledge, and of power. Maldonado-Torres⁴ defines coloniality as "long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism" which delineate "culture, labour, intersubjective

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John Byron, *Cain and Abel in text and tradition: Jewish and Christian interpretations of the first sibling rivalry* (Brill: Boston, 2011), 6, traces the interpretive history of Genesis 4:1-26 in the first millennium, making the interpretive tradition of the story available to a wider audience. His aim is to look at the way the story of Cain and Abel was understood by Jewish and Christian interpreters and eventually expanded and reinterpreted.

- 2 Robert Hayward, "What Did Cain Do Wrong? Jewish and Christian Exegesis of Genesis 4:3-6," in *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity* (eds. Emmanouela Gryepou and Helen Spurling. Brill: Leiden, 2009), 120-122.
- 3 Byron, *Cain and Abel in text and tradition*, 72.
- 4 Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being. Contributions to the development of the Concept," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2&3 (2007): 243.

relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration.” In other words, the demise of colonialism as experienced in the latter half of the previous century, does not imply colonialism’s after effects stopped:

It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in the aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day.⁵

Subsequently, there is a definite process of delinking from the Western and Westernised frames of mind⁶ going on in order to minimise and eventually to cancel coloniality. It is in this delinking process that the role of the West in general and whiteness⁷ in particular is scrutinised, turning them literally into nasty effigies that can be burnt. More to the point, with the dark side of modernity in the West and whiteness’s underbelly revealed is there any redemption for whiteness in South Africa? After all, whiteness is associated with a particular rationality in tandem with Western epistemology, all part of the Western intellectual heritage that is now indicted for its perpetration of racism, oppression and current inequalities in world power and economy. Modernity is on trial and its role in genocides and epistemicides does not make a pleasant picture.

In this unfolding debate whiteness is rendered extremely vulnerable with an implied judgment that will fall on the just and unjust alike. In this instance, the concept of rough justice, which is approximate and violent,

5 Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” 243.

6 Walter D. Mignolo, “Delinking. The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality,” *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2-3 (2007): 449-514.

7 Cobus van Wyngaard recently published an excellent essay on the link between whiteness and Decoloniality (“Whiteness and Public Theology: an Exploration of Listening,” *Missionalia* 43 no 3 2015: 478–492. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7832/43-3-132>). My ideas on whiteness expressed in this article are based on my research presented in Gerrie Snyman, “Empire and a hermeneutics of vulnerability,” *SHE XXXVII Supplement* (2011): 1-20 and “Responding to the decolonial turn: Epistemic Vulnerability,” *Missionalia* 43 no 3 (2015): 266-291. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7832/43-3-77>. The latter article, which has been written in tandem with the current essay, provides a landscape on whiteness in South Africa and deals with some aspects in the current debate.

and which may lead to further injustice, is probably of significance.⁸ Justice does not constitute fairness. It is about restoring balance and not in the least interested in creating a clean slate where all is forgiven and forgotten. In fact, the process of restoration can be filled with terror and destruction. However, the presence of law is supposed to preclude the rough edges of justice.⁹

In terms of the South African context, the constitution that has been negotiated and accepted precludes these rough edges, but it cannot take away rage and the experience of this rage. The latter is testified to by the movements #Rhodesmustfall and #Openstellenbosch.¹⁰ Hugh Pyper explains rage as follows: In terms of the *ius talionis*, an eye for an eye, symmetry may be restored, but not balance. Perpetrator and victim may now have only one eye each, but the innocence of the perpetrator has not been outraged as was the case with the victim. The perpetrator needs to feel the sense of outrage too. Says Pyper:

That will only happen if you feel that an injustice has been done to you [as perpetrator – GFS] and that innocence has been offended against. You may not enjoy losing an eye, but you may be able to console yourself to some extent with the thought that you deserved it. The very justice of the action, if you accept it as just, will draw its sting. So I will poke out the eye of your child and then you might know what it is to be a victim of an unprovoked and unjust assault or to see the innocence of someone you care for violated.¹¹

This rage creates a sense of vulnerability. I have suggested somewhere else that a hermeneutic of vulnerability is imperative for a perpetrator in order to enable him or her to become more response-able and responsible to those

8 Hugh Pyper, “Rough Justice. Lars von Trier’s *Dogville* and *Manderlay* and the Book of Amos,” *Political Theology* 11, no. 3(2010):334.

9 Pyper, “Rough Justice,” 326.

10 The “Rhodes must fall” is a collective movement of students and staff at the University of Cape Town mobilising against institutional racism with the removal of statue of Rhodes as a catalyst symbol for the fall of white supremacy and privilege in South Africa. “Openstellenbosch” is a similar collective of students and staff mobilising to purge the University of Stellenbosch of what they perceive as oppressive remnants of apartheid.

11 Pyper, “Rough Justice,” 326. See also Gerrie F. Snyman, “Sensed fittingness between act and consequence: The last acts of Esther in the book of Esther and Grace in the film *Dogville*.” *HTS Theological Studies* 69, no 1 (2013): 1-9.

who are still bearing the marks of apartheid.¹² On the one hand there is a need to develop a hermeneutic that will empower those who are associated with a perpetrator-disgraced culture to reconstruct themselves and their culture. On the other hand, a hermeneutic that fails to take seriously the effects of colonialism on those who bear the marks of the performativity of whiteness, remains powerless to address the concerns of those dealing with the bad memories of the past. Vulnerability is created when one looks into the eyes of the other and feels the embarrassment of one's own behaviour.

But what happens once vulnerability is created? Is the perpetrator removed from the face of the earth or is he or she rehabilitated back into society? In terms of the history of the Christian interpretation of Cain briefly mentioned in the introductory paragraph, Cain's credentials remain rejected. He is removed from the face of Yahweh. Yet, in terms of the biblical narrative, after receiving his punishment and his plea for remaining alive, Cain moves to another place where he built a city and where his offspring generated culture. It seems there has been redemption for Cain in the story itself. Here Katharina von Kellenbach's¹³ reading of Cain is instructive. She utilises him as a matrix for her own position as a German in the face of the presence of Nazi collaborators in her family that has never been acknowledged.

Before looking into Von Kellenbach's appropriation of the figure of Cain, it is perhaps necessary to inquire into the presence / absence of vulnerability in current South African public discourse as well as the understanding of the concept vulnerability. After these aspects have been discussed, the focus will fall on a reading of Genesis 4 in terms of Cain's rehabilitation as a figure of redemption that may enable the discourse on reconciliation in the country.

12 Gerrie F. Snyman, "Empire and a hermeneutics of vulnerability," *SHE XXXVII Supplement* (2011): 1-20. See also "'Tis a vice to know him". Readers' responseability and responsibility in 2 Chronicles 14:16. *Semeia* 77 (1998): 91-113.

13 Katharina von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain: Guilt and Denial in the Post-war Lives of Nazi Perpetrators* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

2. Vulnerability and confronting the naked face of the Other

The current public discourse is not very conducive to the creation of vulnerability. Vulnerability or resistance to vulnerability is revealed in the ethical moment.¹⁴ It is that moment that comes into being in the confrontation of two individuals, each challenging the case of the other on the basis of the 6th commandment in Ex 20:13 and Dt 5:17: “You shall not kill.” The ethical moment is created in the invisible plea to respect the other, who has become in the meeting metaphorically naked, an orphan, someone without any relations to any other human being. Both partners in this meeting are stripped of everything, uncovered, in short *vulnerable*. The plea not to kill confirms a particular radical responsibility that exists between the two parties.¹⁵ The ethical moment expresses that moment of realizing that the face one sees imposes a radical obligation on someone not to destroy or violate the other. It is important to realize that the meeting creates *mutual* vulnerability: it is recognition of the vulnerability of the other as well as a concomitant vulnerability in the self. It is only when one realizes vulnerability in the self that one can enter the conversation with the vulnerability of the other.

It is not always easy to see the vulnerability in the other. Alisdair MacIntyre’s essay on incommensurability is instructive here.¹⁶ MacIntyre defines incommensurability as “a relationship between two or more systems of thought and practice” with each system “embodying its own particular conceptual scheme,”¹⁷ for example its own norms of interpretation, internal structure, and rationality. MacIntyre refers here to incommensurability in the sense of Thomas Kühn. In radical situations, one might argue,

14 Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and infinity: conversations with Philippe Nemo* (trans. Richard A. Cohen; Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 89.

15 Joseph Thamm, “Lessons Learned,” in *Religious Perspectives on Human Vulnerability in Bioethics. Advancing Global Ethics 2* (Joseph Thamm (ed), Springer: Dordrecht, 2014), 223, refers to the notion of interconnectedness in this regard. He sees it as “the core of all religious commitment to the vulnerable, with the different names of *agape* or charity, neighbourly love, solidarity, *visheshdharma*, *ren*, *karunā* or compassion, and mercy or *hesed*.”

16 Alisdair MacIntyre, “Incommensurability, truth and the conversion between Confucians and Aristotelians about the virtues,” in *Culture and Modernity: East-West philosophical perspectives* (ed. Eliot Deutsch, Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1991).

17 MacIntyre, “Incommensurability,” 109.

[w]hen dealing with rival claims, each tends to image the other in its own terms and according to its own norms. In such a situation, each side easily convinces itself of its [own – GFS] superiority and ultimately fails to achieve a genuine understanding of the other.¹⁸

But to MacIntyre, incommensurability in the sense of profound cultural differences does not boil down to “untranslatability” or the exclusion of all mutual understanding.¹⁹ However, mere fluency in the language of the other tradition is insufficient.²⁰

MacIntyre argues for two conditions to overcome incommensurability.²¹ The first condition is that those who (re)present a particular tradition should be immersed in that tradition in order to accurately present it, that is,

to understand our own standpoint in a way that renders it from our point of view as *problematic* as possible and therefore as maximally *vulnerable* as possible to defeat by that rival. We can only learn what intellectual and moral resources our own standpoint, our own tradition of theoretical and practical inquiry possesses, as well as what intellectual and moral resources its rivals may possess, when we have understood our own point of view in a way that takes with full seriousness the possibility that we may in the end, as rational beings, have to abandon that point of view. [My emphasis – GFS]

The second condition is that one should remember “that in comparing two fundamental standpoints at odds with each other..., we have *no* neutral, independent standpoint from which to do so.”²² In other words, in terms

18 May Sim, *Remastering Morals with Aristotle and Confucius* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2007), 7. Understanding the other becomes quite difficult when the practices and concepts of each tradition are intertwined with the tradition, developed and matured in a shared history (Sim, *Remastering Morals*, 9).

19 MacIntyre, “Incommensurability,” 111.

20 Joseph Tham, “Introduction: The Principle of Vulnerability. Meeting Ground of Six Religions,” in *Religious Perspectives on Human Vulnerability in Bioethics. Advancing Global Ethics 2* (Joseph Thamm (ed), Springer: Dordrecht, 2014), 6.

21 MacIntyre, “Incommensurability,” 121.

22 MacIntyre, “Incommensurability,” 121 speaks of comparing comparisons. For example, comparing Confucianism with Aristotelianism boils down to comparing Confucian comparisons of Confucianism and Aristotelianism with Aristotelian comparisons of Confucianism and Aristotelianism.

of the decolonial turn, it is necessary to critically engage with one's own cultural (in my case Western) tradition and history "in terms of its theory and practice, challenges and crises as well as its successes and failures."²³

It is the lack of critical engagement with the own that is disconcerting in the current public discourse. In fact, there seems to be a particular resistance to be rendered vulnerable and start engaging with the own history. For example, the topic of coloniality has of late become part of South African public discourse. Recently Pres. Jacob Zuma twice²⁴ referred to the permanent presence of white people in South Africa, nonetheless with the disclaimer that the problems (of racism and colonialism) of the country started with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in 1652 and with the formation of the Union in 1910 as the fullest expression of disenfranchisement and colonisation of African people.

Zuma's statement created a climate of resistance to vulnerability within whiteness, causing what Malaika wa Azania experienced as the violence of the white gaze at the Franschoek Literary Festival.²⁵ Azania experienced that violence in the audience's reaction to black speakers (the few invited): shaking of heads, rolling of eyes, patronising responses, the expression of the word "bullsh*t", and people walking out. Her outrage makes her see the festival as exclusively white, with the town itself regarded as a bastion

23 Tham, "Introduction," 6.

24 The first reference (which has gone viral) was in his speech at an ANC fundraiser prior to 103rd celebration of the birth of the ANC and upon which the Freedom Front + laid a complaint at the SAHRC. The reliability of his remarks could not be verified on the ANC's official website, but only in reports by the SAHRC on this issue via the media (cf. <http://www.news24.com/Archives/City-Press/ANC-unlike-other-parties-Zuma-20150429>). The second reference was in response to his State of the Nation address (12 February 2015) on 19 February (cf. Emily Corke, Zuma: SA's problems began with Jan van Riebeeck, *Eyewitnessnews* 19 February 2015. [Online] <http://ewn.co.za/2015/02/19/Zuma-reiterates-SAs-problems-began-with-van-Riebeeck> [Accessed: 10 June 2015]

25 Malaika Wa Azania, "White violence of literary festivals," *Sunday Independent* 31 May 2015. [Online] <http://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/white-violence-of-literary-festivals-1.1865551#VXbTuk2Kcw> [Accessed: 8 June 2015] Her essay in the *Sunday Independent* gave rise to a satirical response by Mike van Graan on Thando Mqgqolozana's announcement at the festival that he is leaving the white literary system (Concerning Franschoek Violence, Books Live, 8 June 2015. [Online] <http://bookslive.co.za/blog/2015/06/08/concerning-franschoek-violence-by-mike-van-graan/> [Accessed: 8 June 2015] And a deliberate paternalistic white response by Deon Maas (Maybe Malaika went looking for it, *Sunday Independent* 7 June 2015. [Online] <http://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/maybe-malaika-went-looking-for-it-1.1868494#VXgu-PmpqBc>).

of what she refers to as white supremacy and the presence of white people creating a violent space for her as a black woman.

From a decolonial perspective it is clear Wa Azania's geo-political and body-political location within the structures of power created by a literary festival in a town known for its Western heritage have been exposed from the start. Because of these power relations the festival spoke by definition from a context that remained hidden, since it operated from a position of invisible power regulated by an invisible norm. With white being the norm the construction of whiteness occurred largely unnoticed and unrecognized. As long as the construction of whiteness goes unnoticed and unrecognized, it remains impossible for vulnerability to enter the scene.

At the annual meeting of the Afrikanerbond former State President F. W. de Klerk delivered a speech in which he took umbrage at Pres. Zuma's negative reference to Jan van Riebeeck.²⁶ De Klerk as well as the Afrikanerbond are an important role players within whiteness in defining the Afrikaner ethnic group. For De Klerk the former reference was an effort to shame his identity and to portray him and his group as intruders without any historical right or claim. Of particular interest for this article is the remarks he made about apartheid. He stated explicitly he had no intention or inclination to justify apartheid in any way. He referred to his apology at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the injustices caused by apartheid. But then he asks whether apartheid was really a crime against humanity. He regards this assumption as an "agitprop" aimed at the stigmatisation of white people by associating them with totalitarian oppression and genocide.

I could not gather from his speech that he inquired into the marks on those who bore the brunt of apartheid—the hurt, the pain, and the loss. In asserting a historical right or claim, he needed to factor the coloniality of being, the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of power. Coloniality in its various guises renders the colonial vulnerable in the light of 500 years

26 Frederik (FW) W. de Klerk, "Ons toekoms is in ons eie hande." Toespraak aan die Bondsraad van die Afrikanerbond se Jaarvergadering by die Voortrekkermonument op 29 Mei 2015. FW de Klerk Foundation. [Online] <http://www.fwdeklerk.org/index.php/afri/nuus/412-toespraak-ons-toekoms-is-in-ons-eie-hande> [Accessed: 4 Junie 2015]

of epistemicides and genocides since the 15th century.²⁷ I am part of this legacy and De Klerk's political resistance in this regard is not helpful.

In contrast, at the occasion of the removal of a plaque of H. F. Verwoerd at a building at the University of Stellenbosch, Wilhelm Verwoerd expressed a particular public vulnerability.²⁸ He moves between empathy for the pain of the distant Anglo-Boer War of his ancestors and the more recent Border War of his parents to his children in the post apartheid period, committing himself to "sincere, humble, patient, cross-border relational journeying" in which he has to overcome his own vulnerability on a daily basis and open himself to "the discomfort, the deconditioning, and the 'resurrection' of cross-cutting compassion." He recognises the wounding experienced by those on the receiving end of apartheid and the profound need of recognition of clenched fists by those who share the responsibility of their woundedness.

It is necessary to expose the own tradition and history, not only in terms of the achievements of modernity, but also the underbelly of modernity on which these achievements were built. To be more precise, before one makes an argument about the similarity of apartheid and the Holocaust, it is necessary to look at the marks left on those who bore the brunt of apartheid.

It is here that I want to introduce the figure of Cain. Can Cain as (ultimate) perpetrator help me to understand the issue of perpetration in terms of South African apartheid history? Is his depiction as an absolute perpetrator an obstacle in the discourse of reconciliation in the sense that perpetrators will fail to acknowledge their perpetration because of what the interpretation history did to Cain in portraying him without any redemptive traits?

27 Ramon Grosfoguel, "The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 11 no. 1 (2013):73-90.

28 Wilhelm Verwoerd, "Letting go of Verwoerd, again," *Rand Daily Mail* 3 June 2015. [Online] <http://www.rdm.co.za/politics/2015/06/03/letting-go-of-hendrik-verwoerd-again> [Accessed: 4 June 2015]

3. Cain as ultimate perpetrator in interpretive history

The immediate question one has is how the figure of Cain can be of any help in the process of decolonisation when aspects of the story, such as the mark of Cain, once served as an instrument to marginalise people by excluding them or by discriminating against them? Mellinkoff says there is a direct link between the interpretation of the mark and a particular view on Cain's crime and his behaviour after the murder in early Jewish thought:²⁹

a sinner who sincerely repented and was therefore rewarded with a token of forgiveness; or the opposite, an unregenerate, unredeemable murderer whose sign advertised his shameful deed.³⁰

John Byron summarises it well:

The branding of Cain is a development of his crime. Ancient exegetes were not satisfied with merely calling him “unrighteous” or “wicked.” Instead they magnified his crime in ways that cannot be found in Genesis 4. Not only was Cain the first to commit murder, he was also the first to reject Wisdom, promote evil and bring about the destruction of the world. He is, in many ways, the prototype of the wicked; the first to bring evil into the world and to multiply it. While his crime earned him a certain level of notoriety, it was the specific type of murder that attracted the attention of some exegetes. Cain committed fratricide, which in the minds of some authors, was very serious indeed. So serious, that the author of 1 John could appeal to the story as part of his warning to the brother haters.³¹

3.1. Cain in early Christian history: Fratricide

Over the centuries the figure of Cain served society rather well: his depraved humanity made “him an excellent vehicle and scapegoat to compare with

29 Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 5-10.

30 Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain*, 5

31 Byron, *Cain and Abel in text and tradition*, 211.

and criticize those thought to be of the same ilk.”³² André LaCocque is quite adamant that there is no rehabilitation for Cain.³³ He argues as follows:

Within the Cain paradigm, leaving the face of God means returning to the soullessness of the clay. And, as there is no disclosure of meaning to draw from the clay he is treading, Cain is wandering aimlessly from field to field, starting with the range where he killed his brother. He strolls without command, lawlessly, but also senselessly. Immersed in soullessness, he becomes himself soulless, “cursed from the ground,” which itself is already cursed (Gen 3:17).³⁴

LaCocque associates the rehabilitation of Cain with a negative evaluation of the role of the deity, usually portrayed as a sadistic slayer acting arbitrarily.³⁵ To him, the enormity of the crime, namely fratricide, is of such magnitude that it surpasses the borders of decency. In fact, it dwarfs the transgression of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. He argues that even the deity is overwhelmed by the crime (v. 10). To LaCocque Cain’s crime has a cosmic repercussion: The soil Cain tills is no longer blessed since Abel’s blood cries from it.³⁶ Cain becomes estranged from the ground as well as from Yahweh. He removes himself from the face of God. According to LaCocque, the face of God is the grounding into the world, implying that Cain loses his place in life and in the universe.³⁷ Cain does it voluntarily, and LaCocque ascribes it to either Cain finding the face of God intolerable to bear or simply because of his rebellious rage.³⁸ LaCocque diagnoses Cain as narcissistic and declares the angst Cain experiences is that of the threat towards his integrity and pride.³⁹

32 Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain*, xi states it succinctly: “[T]hus mankind [sic] continuously turned its kaleidoscope ever so slightly on the succinct biblical story of Cain and Abel, magnifying and splitting it into what seemed to be ever-increasing and variegated images.”

33 André LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence: Cain, Abel, and the Yahwist* (James Clarke & Co: Cambridge, 2008), 96-100.

34 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 97.

35 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 98. He has Walter Brueggemann and W. Lee Humphreys in mind when he emphatically rejects Cain’s rehabilitation.

36 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 99-100.

37 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 101.

38 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 102.

39 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 103.

LaCocque's interpretation of Cain stands in the tradition of the Early Church for whom Cain became "the primordial example of sinful behaviour for the rest of humanity."⁴⁰ Ancient interpretation overburdened the story to the extent that its construction of Cain in the different interpretations failed to find any correspondence with the biblical account: "Not satisfied with his status as the first murder or sinner, some interpreters extended their critique of Cain to include accusations that he oppressed the poor, increased sin and brought about the destruction of creation. Some even accused him of becoming a teacher of evil practice."⁴¹

In *De Civitate Dei*, Books XI-XIV, Augustine picks up on the idea of fratricide. He links the city of men to Cain and the City of God to Abel. The founding of the terrestrial city of men is based on fratricide and Augustine relates this event to the foundation of Rome with Remus being killed by Romulus. However, the latter was the result of an earthly city divided by itself, the wicked fighting the wicked. In contrast, with Cain and Abel the wicked was fighting the good.⁴²

Brotherhood was necessary in an environment filled with "unexplainable fortune or failure, envy, jealousy, hate, rivalry between economically determined groups play[ed] a role in everyday life."⁴³ Thus, the relationship between Lot and Abraham, for example, is regarded as a good relationship between brothers (see Gen 13:8). Unity between brothers is highly regarded in Ps 133. On a metaphorical level the term "brother" denotes someone very close, for example David mourning Jonathan (2 Sam 1:26).⁴⁴

A similar solidarity is found amongst brothers in Greece, to the point of avenging the murder of a brother.⁴⁵ Fraternity in Greece implies the same

40 Byron, *Cain and Abel in text and tradition*, 224.

41 Byron, *Cain and Abel in text and tradition*, 225.

42 See Rick Benjamin, "Augustine on Cain and Abel," in *Eve's Children. The Biblical Stories Retold and Interpreted in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. Gerard F. Luttikhuisen, Leiden: Brill, 2003), 137: "Abel stands for the city of God, the race of men who improve themselves by grace; Cain represents the terrestrial city of men who do not wish to amend."

43 Noort, "Genesis 4:1-16", 105.

44 Jan N Bremmer, "Brothers and Fratricide in the Ancient Mediterranean Israel, Greece and Rome," in *Eve's Children. The Biblical Stories Retold and Interpreted in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. Gerard F Luttikhuisen, Leiden: Brill, 2003), 78.

45 Bremmer, "Brothers and Fratricide," 79. It was regarded a disgrace not to avenge.

identity in different bodies.⁴⁶ In Rome brothers were expected to share certain obligations, especially in terms of the social, political and military spheres.⁴⁷ However, it does not mean brothers were in harmony with one another and fratricide indeed occurred. Fratricide was not uncommon. But when it happens, the circumstances were considered in a very serious light, for example when one brother turned out very bad.⁴⁸

Fratricide was thought to signal the breakdown of society.⁴⁹ It is most probably for this reason that the author of the Cain story did not use matricide or patricide to designate life outside of the Garden of Eden. According to Bremmer, patricide and matricide are not found in the Old Testament and could very well have been beyond the author's imagination.⁵⁰ This was clearly not the case in Greek or Roman mythologies.⁵¹ One need to realise that in communities where state formation has not yet occurred, men depended on one another for survival, hence the importance of solidarity amongst brothers as a guarantee for survival. To Ed Noort, brotherhood was of the essence in this kind of community—and not only between brothers, but also between families, clans, tribes and peoples.⁵² Fratricide constitutes the breaking of a code that would enable a community to survive. Hence the value attached to it in antiquity.

3.2. Cain as the archetype of evil

For Philo Cain represents a type of wickedness and Abel a type of holiness. According to Hindy Najman, Cain and Abel represent character traits which result into perpetual conflict. In Philo this conflict becomes an allegory of the inner conflict within every soul.⁵³ Cain became for Philo

46 Bremmer, "Brothers and Fratricide," 81.

47 Bremmer, "Brothers and Fratricide," 82.

48 Bremmer, "Brothers and Fratricide," 83.

49 Bremmer, "Brothers and Fratricide," 84.

50 Bremmer, "Brothers and Fratricide," 91.

51 Bremmer, "Brothers and Fratricide," 92.

52 Ed Noort, "Genesis 4:1-16". From Paradise to Reality: The Myth of Brotherhood," in *Eve's Children. The Biblical Stories Retold and Interpreted in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. Gerard F. Luttikhuisen, Leiden: Brill, 2003), 105.

53 Hindy Najman, "Cain and Abel as Character Traits: A Study in the Allegorical Typology of Philo of Alexandria," in *Eve's Children. The Biblical Stories Retold and Interpreted in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. Gerard F Luttikhuisen, Leiden: Brill, 2003), 113.

the archetype of evil which he associates with self-loving. Any “self-lover” thus shares in the murder committed by Cain.⁵⁴ Najman argues that Philo’s interpretation of Cain boils down to a specific typology in which Cain represents an aspect of the human soul, namely its capacity for good and its capacity for evil.⁵⁵ But in Cain there is only evil. Cain becomes a self-lover that failed to guard Abel.⁵⁶ The professions of Cain and Abel, tiller of the soil and shepherd coincide with the traits of their respective characters. Cain as tiller of the soil guides himself to lifeless and material objects, led away from contemplating life and living things. Even his name contributes to his character traits: his name is thought to mean possession, that is, Cain thinks he possesses all things.⁵⁷ Subsequently, Cain’s name reveals his self-loving character, reinforced by his profession as a tiller of the soil—Cain is thought to refer “all things to himself and to his mind,” destroying himself in the process.⁵⁸ In contrast, Abel is a shepherd preparing himself for the future. These two different dispositions, the self-lover focussing on the now and the God-lover contemplating the future, cannot coexist in peace: “And their tragic story exemplifies the pitfalls we must all seek to avoid.”⁵⁹

3.3. Cain’s association with the Jews

The association between Cain and the Jews started with Early Christianity. For example, Irenaeus of Lyon compares Jewish sacrifice to Cain’s offering and to the death of Jesus:

For while they were thought to offer correctly so far as outward appearance went, they had in themselves jealousy like to Cain; therefore they slew the Just One, slighting the counsel of the Word, as did also Cain.⁶⁰

54 See Philo, *Det.* 78.

55 Hindy Najman, “Cain and Abel as Character Traits: A Study in the Allegorical Typology of Philo of Alexandria,” in *Eve’s Children. The Biblical Stories Retold and Interpreted in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. Gerard F. Luttikhuisen, Leiden: Brill, 2003), 107.

56 Philo, *Det.* 68.

57 Philo, *Sacr.* 1.2.

58 Najman, “Cain and Abel as Character Traits,” 113. See Philo QG 1.62.

59 Najman, “Cain and Abel as Character Traits,” 115. See also Philo, *Sacr.* 4.

60 Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.18.3. See also Byron, *Cain and Abel in text and tradition*, 236.

In his book *Contra Faustum* Augustine draws a parallel between Cain and the Jews. Both are associated with tilling the soil, unsatisfied with their lot and became murderers, Cain killing Abel and the Jews killing Christ. He first draws a link between the practice of the Jews and Cain's sacrificial practice:

For though the Jews were right in practising these things, they were guilty of unbelief in not distinguishing the time of the New Testament when Christ came, from the time of the Old Testament. God said to Cain, "If thou offerest well, yet if thou dividest not well, thou hast sinned."⁶¹

He then associates the death of Jesus and the death of Abel by portraying Jesus's death as murder similar to the death of Abel as fratricide:

Abel, the younger brother, is killed by the elder brother; Christ, the head of the younger people, is killed by the elder people of the Jews. Abel dies in the field; Christ dies on Calvary.⁶²

As punishment both became alienated. But in early Christianity the Jews survived. As a pariah nation the Jews received protection so that no ruler under whom they lived would kill the people with the mark of Cain on them: "The Jews were preserved as proof and warning: proof of the antiquity of God's prophecies, warning to all those (like the Manichees) who would repeat their error by denying His prophecies and killing His flesh."⁶³ To Augustine, they were like milestones along a route informing the travellers while they themselves are senseless and immobile.⁶⁴

3.4. Repercussions in later history

Early Christianity's interpretation of the Cain and Abel story had repercussions later in history. It led to the exclusion of Jews from various spheres and fed a particular anti-Judaism within Christianity. It enabled Christianity to brand itself as superior to Judaism and laid the foundations

61 Augustine, *Faust.* 4.12.9.

62 Augustine, *Faust.* 4.12.9. See also Byron, *Cain and Abel in text and tradition*, 239.

63 Nirenberg, David. "The Birth of the Pariah: Jews, Christian Dualism, and Social Science," *Social Research* 70 no. 2 (2009): 225.

64 David, "The Birth of the Pariah," 226.

for Jewish persecutions later on in history, for example in the Lateran Council of 1215 when Pope Innocent III decreed the wearing of badges on their clothing by the Jews in order to distinguish them from Christians.⁶⁵ In the first half of the 20th century there was a knock-on effect of subjection when the Holocaust took place. But there was an earlier knock-on effect of which one should take note when the mark of Cain became associated with black skin.

With the Jews labelled as enemies-of-Christ in the 13th century, the encounter in the 15th century onwards with non-Christian (strange) people, that is, people not from European origin in the Americas and Africa, was constructed in Christian theological terms. The monotheistic Christian religion was unable to conceive of an other, be it an other human or an other deity. Christianity at the time rather facilitated an understanding of the strange people as enemies to the Christian religion, thus pagan-idolaters.⁶⁶ Subsequently, the non-Europeans would be regarded as abnormal, and “the only available slot of Otherness to their Norm, into which they would classify these non-European populations, was one that defined the latter in terms of their ostensible subhuman status.”⁶⁷ The subhuman status was based on the inhabitants’ rejection of the Christian gospel. Rejection meant that they could “justifiably” be categorised as enemies-of-Christ and lose their land.⁶⁸ Refusal of the gospel entailed that they were now free game to the missionaries who attacked, captured and enslaved them and expropriating their lands in the process. Ultimately, blackness itself became characterised as the mark of Cain.⁶⁹

65 See Byron, *Cain and Abel in text and tradition*, 242-43.

66 Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation. An argument,” *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003):292.

67 Wynter, “Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom,” 292. Wynter states that the case of abnormality was similar to the view from the Other. The Congolese regarded the white skin of the European as a “sign of monstrous deviance” to their norm of being (i.e. black) and classified the European with their deceased.

68 Wynter, “Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom,” 294. To the Portuguese and Spaniards of the time the land was divided in the habitable within God’s grace and the uninhabitable outside it (p. 295).

69 In Phyllis Wheatley’s poem, *On Being Brought from Africa to America*, she captures race and the mark of Cain in the following verses:

Some view our sable race with scornful eye,

5. Cain and the struggle for liberation from apartheid

In contrast to the connection between Cain and blackness, Alan Boesak's liberationist reading associates Cain with oppression. According to him, oppressors are homeless like Cain.⁷⁰ The fear that Cain experiences, is read into white fear: "And so whites remain anxious and fearful. They live in anxiety because they never know what might happen next."⁷¹ As with Cain, they continue to wonder when the day of reckoning will arrive; they do not have rest for their souls; they do not sleep well. They have to live with their own conscience.⁷² Boesak regards them as oppressors who have removed themselves from the world like Cain, who broke with God and the world. Like Cain, the white oppressors have no place or rest for their souls.⁷³ Cain continues to live, but it is a life of "restlessness, uneasiness, uncertainty, violence, ceaseless wandering, a life in which there is no peace with God and one's fellows."⁷⁴ It is a lifelong struggle towards forgiveness.

In contrast to Boesak's association of Cain with oppression, for Itumeleng Mosala Cain remains black, but in a way very different from the colonising association referred to above. In the traditional interpretation, Cain is the evil perpetrator, but in Mosala's version he becomes a victim of a class struggle, a symbol for the village peasants dispossessed of their land by the ruling class in the Davidic monarchy, represented by Abel.⁷⁵ The village peasants resisted encroachments on their lands, and the death of Abel is regarded by Mosala as one possible victory against the encroachers. But because the ruling elite wrote the text, Abel will not be the oppressor. He

"Their colour is a diabolic die"

Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain,

May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

See Wendy N Smolash, "Mark of Cain (ada): Racialized security discourse in Canada's national newspapers." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (2009):747: "literally marked and naturalized as 'evil' by their darkness, like Cain in the Old Testament."

70 Allan B. Boesak and Leonard Sweetman. *Black and reformed: apartheid, liberation, and the Calvinist tradition* (Orbis Books, 1984), 151.

71 Boesak and Leonard Sweetman. *Black and reformed*, 152.

72 Boesak and Leonard Sweetman. *Black and reformed*, 152.

73 Boesak and Leonard Sweetman. *Black and reformed*, 151.

74 Boesak and Leonard Sweetman. *Black and reformed*, 154.

75 Itumeleng Mosala, *Biblical hermeneutics and black theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989, 23).

becomes the victim. Says Mosala of Boesak's interpretation: "The story of the oppressed has been stolen by the oppressors and is being used as an ideological weapon against the oppressed in subsequent histories."⁷⁶

4. Cain and Nazi perpetrators

But what if one takes Boesak's association of Cain with oppression seriously? This association between oppression and Cain is more or less taken up by Katherina von Kellenbach who finds solace in the figure of Cain in her own geopolitical context, Germany, in her book, *The Mark of Cain. Guilt and Denial in the Post-War Lives of Nazi Perpetrators*.⁷⁷ She associates the Nazi perpetrators and their collective legacy with Cain. Cain is neither hero nor villain. His legacy is not erased, but burnt into the collective memory. Memory is the reason why Von Kellenbach thinks he can serve as a matrix for the discourse on the legacy of Nazi perpetration during the Holocaust. He failed dismally to hide the murder from the deity. He is punished but does not perish because a mark protects him from violent revenge. That mark

is a public signifier of his guilt. It protects him and prevents the erasure of memory. There is no miraculous purification of guilt in the story of Cain. No sacrifice cleanses the stain of Abel's blood. No ritual absolves Cain from the guilt of the past. Instead, God's protective mark imposes radical transparency and *links Cain's redemption to memory*. Truth-telling becomes the basis of moral and spiritual recovery. Cain lives a successful and productive life as a married man, father, and founder of a city as he grows into the memory of fratricide and (re)gains moral integrity. [My italics – GFS]⁷⁸

76 Mosala, *Biblical hermeneutics and black theology*, 22. For a discussion on Boesak and Mosala's reading of the story of Cain and Abel, see also Gerald West, "Reading 'The Text' and reading 'behind the Text,'" in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*. JSOT Suppl Series 87. (eds. David J. A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl and Stanley E. Porter, Sheffield University Press: Sheffield, 1990), 299-320 and Mark McEntire, "Cain and Abel in Africa: An Ethiopian case study in competing hermeneutics," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, trajectories, and trends* (eds. Gerald O West and Musa W Dube, Leiden: Brill, 2001):248-259.

77 Katharina von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain: Guilt and Denial in the Post-war Lives of Nazi Perpetrators* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

78 Von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain*, 10.

In the face of a perpetrator the issue of memory is quite important. The public white discourse in South Africa is focused on forgetting the past in the hope of building a better future. But those who bore the brunt cannot forget it and continuously bear witness to it. Von Kellenbach refers to the enormous extent of the hurt and pain of the Holocaust that makes the act of remembering rather intolerable if not impossible for both survivor and perpetrator (and their families, one should add).⁷⁹ Survivors are usually committed to bear witness whereas perpetrators, in contrast, are committed to “forgetting, erasing, and burying the guilt of the past.”⁸⁰ Nazi perpetrators and their descendants are vague and obscure in their biographies. Driven by fear of guilt by association they exhibit “an internal compulsion to conceal the truth and to hide the shame.”⁸¹

To Von Kellenbach neither forgiveness nor punishment in terms of Christian soteriology is able to remove the burden of guilt. Subsequently, on an emotional and private level, the micro-history of Nazi perpetrators holds their families and communities captive. Time does not heal all wounds and any act of wrongdoing creates a moral obligation towards the victims.⁸² Her argument is that any desire for closure in this context constitutes a form of escapism. She prefers to “learn to shoulder the legacy of perpetration and to acknowledge the reality of the agents of collective evil.”⁸³ The story of Cain is to her “a paradigm for the central role memory in the process of moral recovery for communities of perpetration.”⁸⁴

One can summarize her argument as follows:⁸⁵ Cain leaves his father’s house to rebuild his own in an open conversation about his life. Cain’s story correlates redemption, transparency, and remembrance in as much as repentance is turned into a public affair in terms of conduct and communication. Atonement happens over a lifetime with small steps and

79 Von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain*, 8.

80 Von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain*, 8. Von Kellenbach refers to “[t]he wilful blindness required to ignore the suffering of the victims festers and grows over time.” (p 206).

81 Von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain*, 8.

82 Von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain*, 9.

83 Von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain*, 9.

84 Von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain*, 9.

85 Her understanding of the story of Cain and its relevance for her project develops between pp. 22-28.

numerous daily interactions that change perspectives, modify attitudes, and repair relationships. Cain's battle with the legacy of fratricide goes through many stages in which he encounters different peoples, places and philosophies. The mark of Cain is a sign of grace, because transparency removes the sting of guilt. The acknowledgement of wrongdoing makes the recollection's power to haunt and terrify to disappear. The mark of Cain is not a stigma to denounce but is a sign of protection that turns the public proclamation of guilt into an integral aspect of Cain's redemption. It is only the perpetrator's truthful engagement with the atrocities inflicted on victims that can provide a release from the moral remainders of history. The history of atrocities will only keep on haunting the perpetrator as long as the latter remains ideologically committed to the victim's lack of humanity. Release from guilt can be measured by a person's ability to bear the reality of victim's suffering. As long as the victim's humanity is denied, no release takes place.

Von Kellenbach describes the mark of Cain as "a path of moral repair based on openness and transparency."⁸⁶ It is not a stigma, but a mark of protection that enables life. Cain does not die but settles in Nod, marries, fathers a son, builds a city and establishes arts music and culture.⁸⁷ His ability to live a life is to Von Kellenbach evidence that he learned to master the sin lurking at the door the deity warned him about. Moreover, his new life is built upon his ability to honour the memory of his brother.⁸⁸

Von Kellenbach's utilisation of the story of Cain stands against the understanding of the mark as a repressive stigma. In the past, as already mentioned, the mark of Cain became synonymous with exclusion and discrimination, starting with anti-Semitism and ending with racism and xenophobia:

86 Von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain*, 208.

87 Von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain*, 12.

88 It is important to see how Von Kellenbach arrives at this conclusion. The text does not say it, but she justifies her view on the basis of what is unrecorded, for example the implied role of his wife in facilitating his transformation rests upon Von Kellenbach's research into Nazi perpetrators and the role some of their wives played in facilitating or blocking moral and spiritual transformation. The same happens with the voiceless Enoch. See Von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain*, 13-14.

The mark of Cain played not only an ignominious role in the history of Christian anti-Judaism but was also used to justify racism and colonialism. Black skin became the mark of shame that legitimated capture, trade, and enslavement of African peoples and the colonization of non-white populations by European Christians. As a divine stigma, the mark of Cain invited and justified the mistreatment of vulnerable minorities (or majorities in the case of colonization), who were considered guilty of some past violation and deserved to be subjugated.⁸⁹

In fact, the history of the interpretation of the mark of Cain speaks against using the story as a paradigm for perpetrators. In Von Kellenbach's terms the mark becomes a symbol of the liberating power of memory that provides Cain with the possibility of transformation—moral regeneration and the restoration of his human dignity:

In my reading, the mark of Cain encapsulates the task incumbent upon perpetrators. Cain's success as a human being is measured by his ability to resist the impulse to bury, forget, and cut off the past. Cain's crime does not end his life. He lives on and gets a second chance, but only because he does not erase the guilt of his past. His life as city builder and father of toolmakers, artisans, and musicians depends on his ability to respect the memory of his brother and to accept his responsibility.⁹⁰

5. Cain as ultimate white perpetrator?

The question is now whether one can take Von Kellenbach's association of Cain with Holocaust perpetrators and relates him to white apartheid oppressiveness. Will Cain's position in the story help one to understand the current position of whiteness in the aftermath of apartheid? One can even go larger and add to the configuration also modernity and its underbelly of slavery, exploitation and capitalism that caused the death of millions of the non-Western other.

89 Von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain*, 15.

90 Von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain*, 15.

If one looks from a perpetrator's perspective to the Cain story, any interpretation that links the murder with atheism or lack of trust in the deity becomes suspicious, as Ed Noort for example argues. To him, it is crucial to understand that a human being not trusting Yahweh is turned into a wrongdoer who may commit fratricide.⁹¹ He reads the story as an illustration of the first child who was naturally born into the real world, becoming a murderer.⁹² The problem of an argument like this is as follows: Should one then assume that the West has been all the time "without Yahweh," rendering the religious basis for the colonial enterprise a sham just in order to obtain material goods? The problem is that religion ran very deep in modernity and its underbelly as the missionary enterprise of conversion has shown. Moreover, apartheid itself has been theologically justified and the previous republican South African dispensation of 1961-1994 was very Christian.⁹³

As the story starts with the birth of Cain, the expectations of him are piled high. His mother proclaims his birth as a divine creation⁹⁴ and the role of Adam in his conception is ignored.⁹⁵ Abel's presence is minimal and always related to Cain. His role is that of being the brother of Cain.⁹⁶ And with a name referring to breath or nothingness,⁹⁷ Abel's vulnerability becomes accentuated after the murder when Yahweh asks Cain the whereabouts of his brother. Cain's brisk response ("Am I my brother's keeper?") and Abel's blood said to be crying out highlight Abel's voicelessness and what Van Wolde calls "negation of the existence of the other as an equal, as a brother."⁹⁸ The negation is visible in the non-conversation Cain had with

91 Noort, "Genesis 4:1-16", 105.

92 Noort, "Genesis 4:1-16", 105.

93 See Gerrie Snyman, "Totius: die ironie van vergewe en vergeet," *LitNet Akademies* (Godsdienwetenskap) 12, no. 2 (2015). Online : <http://www.litnet.co.za/Article/totius-die-ironie-van-vergewe-en-vergeet>

94 Claus Westerman, *Genesis 1-11. A Commentary*, (trans. John J Scullion SJ; Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House 1984), 291.

95 Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus and other Problems for Men in Monotheism* (Boston: Beacon Press 1994), 140.

96 Ellen van Wolde, "The story of Cain and Abel: A Narrative Study," *JSOT* 52 (1991): 36.

97 Westerman, *Genesis 1-11*, 292. Van Wolde, "The story of Cain and Abel," 36 refers to his name as "minimum" and "sheer transience."

98 Van Wolde, "The story of Cain and Abel," 35.

his brother: the story in the MT provides no content, making it empty and insubstantial.⁹⁹

Then follow the murder. The subsequent punishment serves as an indication of the consequences of Cain's act. In literally severing the ties with his brother, Cain also severs the ties with his immediate community, i.e. family and tribe, larger society, God and earth. The latter ceases to be responsive to Cain's labour, compelling him to move from place to place to eke out a living.¹⁰⁰ Cain is prohibited from practicing his trade. As a farmer he is forced to leave his fields because the earth, in sucking up Abel's blood, has been rendered unusable and infertile.¹⁰¹ Thus Cain becomes a wanderer and a fugitive, socially and culturally displaced. The murder made him unclean and anyone dealing with him will be rendered similarly unclean. Cain is ultimately banned from the community, because he rendered the community unstable.¹⁰² Being severed from his clan and tribe constitutes a death sentence. It makes him vulnerable, turning him into an outlaw, like a prey for wild beasts. His life is in continuous jeopardy. Cain is forced to leave the place where he lived. Moreover, he leaves the presence of Yahweh, who in effect removed his divine protection. Says LaCocque:

Cain, banned from the clan, feels that he must hide from God and from man. A fugitive away from heaven and earth, his miserable existence would be the one of a living dead, of a ghost (*not* a nomad) roaming aimlessly in an absence of time and space and in a space without contour, were it not for God's compassion.¹⁰³

Yet for Cain to survive, the *ius talionis* is suspended. LaCocque argues Cain's lament, although understandable as his cry is parallel to the crying blood of Abel, remains an insensibility and an effrontery.¹⁰⁴

99 Van Wolde, "The story of Cain and Abel," 35.

100 Sicker, *Reading Genesis Politically*, 57. Sicker states that when the land fails to yield anything to Cain, and Cain is forced to earn a living by other means, Cain receives the ultimate retribution.

101 Says Westerman, *Genesis 1-11*, 306: "The earth's jaws gaped open to swallow the blood of the one murdered by his brother and denied the farmer its produce."

102 Noort, "Genesis 4:1-16", 105.

103 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 116.

104 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 114.

Van Wolde thinks differently. To her the sentence is harsh enough. Cain merely proclaims his own vulnerability as he realises the curse will cause everyone wanting to kill him. Cain is not complaining about the sentence, he is coming to terms with the severity of his act and the insufferability of its consequences. After all, the curse implies banishment, which consists of being cut off from the means for life, such as nourishment, security, prosperity and protection.¹⁰⁵ Van Wolde is of the opinion that Cain shows at last some responsibility towards his brother and for his own evil deed.¹⁰⁶

Cain's punishment implies that Yahweh has removed his protection so that the life of Cain can be exchanged for his brother's. However, Yahweh will not allow such retribution. But it is not as if Yahweh will intervene when someone tries to kill Cain. It is only that the killer should realise that Cain's death will receive a sevenfold vengeance.¹⁰⁷ Ironically, and only at this moment, the compassion shown to Abel's sacrifice is now similarly visited upon Cain¹⁰⁸ who has become as worthless as he once regarded his brother. Absence from the face of God amounts to a certain death, but Cain, now a fugitive, receives a mark of protection, whatever it may be.¹⁰⁹ This mark does not cancel the process of justice. Cain does not receive a clean slate to start over with. He remains under the burden of his injustice, exposed to the anger of God and an outcast.¹¹⁰

But Cain does not disappear. He survives and ultimately settles somewhere else. Even here, in interpretive history, Cain remains without redemption. For example, LaCocque understands the land Nod to mean nowhere land: "There, the outlaw Cain will be a ruler, the imposer of a rule under his own authority. Cain's law will replace God's law—a pitiful parody that is endlessly echoed in ancient and modern totalitarian states' laws."¹¹¹ Yet

105 Westerman, *Genesis 1-11*, 309 argues here that the full burden of Cain's misdeed is laid upon him in his lament.

106 Van Wolde, "The story of Cain and Abel," 36.

107 Cf. Sicker, *Reading Genesis Politically*, 58.

108 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 114.

109 Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain*, 2-3 says that the "lack of scriptural information did not, however, prevent fertile imaginations from filling the gap with a fascinating and contradictory panorama of conjectures, reveries, legends, and questionable traditions."

110 Westerman, *Genesis 1-11*, 310.

111 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 97.

the building of the city has, in spite of LaCocque's earlier claim of the impossibility of rehabilitation, a redeeming quality.¹¹² The city is linked to Cain's son, as if "through having a child" Cain is compelled to retrieve his humanity in the midst of nothingness: Nod, his place of settlement constitutes nothingness and his child remains practically motherless with the name of the mother withheld.¹¹³

But the son is real and inaugurates something, says LaCocque. Cain may be removed from humanity, but his child retrieves for Cain his humanity, and memory. The mentioning of his wife and the birth of his child suggest to LaCocque two acts of procreation, ensuring a future for Cain.¹¹⁴ Cain receives a genealogy reflecting his offspring who, in turn, make their mark on society. Cain becomes part of history, of memory, linking him to particular accomplishments, such as the establishing of civilisation in the form of a city followed by a series of foundations of other ways of life: nomadic life, primeval arts (music) and the work of the smith (the forging of metals).¹¹⁵

Cain's punishment and mark do not prevent Cain from living life. The city becomes the mark. Joel Lohr argues that the building of a city is mentioned just after Cain's lament as well as Yahweh's provision of a mark to prevent him from being killed. To him the city with its protective walls and gates is rather suggestive of the mark given to Cain. A city is a place of protection and refuge, an idea quite common in the Old Testament. After the provision of the mark Cain no longer wanders, but settles:

In building the city and settling, the city would provide protection for Cain and his family and would exclude the possibility of seven-fold vengeance for avengers, the killing and subsequent vengeance would, through its protective walls and gates, be prevented—

112 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 105. LaCocque speaks of Cain not being irremediably ignoble and certainly not noble, just human. He finds the building of the city as an example of Cain rebounding. As a reader he feels psychologically surprised.

113 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 112.

114 LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 130.

115 Westerman, *Genesis 1-11*, 325.

something unambiguously promised by YHWH in establishing the sign.¹¹⁶

6. Conclusion

There are many gaps in the story of Cain and Abel which have been filled out in the history of the story's interpretation. This essay cannot do justice to the entire history and has merely picked nuggets that may help to give direction to an answer regarding the appropriation of the figure of Cain within a postapartheid context. Let me return to the question I posed at the beginning: Is the depiction of Cain as an absolute perpetrator an obstacle in the discourse of reconciliation in the sense that perpetrators will fail to acknowledge their perpetration because of what the interpretation history did to Cain in portraying him without any redemptive traits?

It is clear there is an interpretive tradition that portrays Cain as an ultimate perpetrator without any redemption. However, the Christian tradition which partakes in this line of interpretation also utilised the story to demonise other groups for various reasons. When the tables are turned and the tradition is taken to task for such demonization, an association with Cain may call up similar demonization, as testified by Boesak's liberationist reading. Without realising it until the moment of encountering Boesak's connection between whiteness and Cain, the proposed identification of whiteness with Cain was not clear in my own mind. Whereas Von Kellenbach's position is one of being removed from the original acts of participating in the Holocaust—she is the third post-Holocaust generation—I am still part of that generation directly linked to the participation in apartheid. More demanding than initially conceived is the process of becoming vulnerable in the position of perpetrator (of racism in the immediate past and corporate complicity in coloniality and the oppression that is associated with colonialism itself). It requires, in the face of African perceptions of whiteness, a critical re-emergence in the own tradition to acquaint oneself with the problem, with a concomitant ethical questioning of the morality of one own life orientation and view. It is not

116 Joel N. Lohr, "'So Yahweh established a sign for Cain': Rethinking Genesis 4:15." *ZAW* 121 (2009):103.

an easy process, but what draws me to Von Kellenbach's appropriation was the sense of redemption she attached to Cain: Despite the seriousness of the crime, the justice meted out and the mark he received, Cain succeeded in living a fruitful life, producing an offspring that is linked to humanity's creativity.

I am not sure whether Cain had those experiences Von Kellenbach attributed to him and whether his story can be appropriated validly in this way. Nor would I like to compare apartheid with murder in order to minimise the effect of a break in civilisation apartheid caused. Suffice it to say that the hurt, pain and loss caused by this system are sufficient to work with. I am part and parcel of this tradition and was enlisted to fight its cause during the obligatory military service system. I am implicated, as Boesak suggested of white people in the country. Like Cain I have to face justice, no matter how rough and unfair it can seem to be. And I can lament, especially in the face of #Rhodesmustfall or #Openstellenbosch that exposed the underbelly of apartheid and colonialism. But there is a difference between whining and lamenting—the former the perspective from the mere discomfort of a dispensation threatening you; the latter from a mourning of the loss of power that forces one to grapple with finding a new sense of purpose and identity, ultimately a new reading of the biblical text in which African thinking becomes part of the intellectual heritage.

Cain left the face of Yahweh (and the security of his immediate clan) and became (at least for a while) a wanderer and a fugitive before he established a city, set root, conceived a son and enabled arts, science, and culture. Some have removed themselves from the country after 1994. Others have moved to establish a community that is self-sufficient and as free as possible from governmental power. Others have moved into intellectual laagers and gated communities, pushing the boundary of reality to the entrance of a security estate. Those who cannot afford such estates have become prisoners in their own homes. And there we have nothing to do with the rest.

Between Cain's removal of himself from the presence of Yahweh and his establishment of a city I would argue Cain was liminal, like my generation, those born in the fifties and sixties. We belong nowhere. We bore the brunt of the last agonies of apartheid and now we bear the brunt of outrage. We want to belong to Africa, but I am not sure we know what it takes or are

even prepared to fulfil the requirements. I cannot reject my Western roots, no matter how critical I become of them. But I can be open to Africa. I cannot do the latter if I keep on rolling my eyes or cry “bullsh*t”. Like Cain I need to come to terms with my vulnerability. And in my vulnerability I am not a victim.

Central to Von Kellenbach’s interpretation and appropriation of Cain is the issue of memory. Cain is not allowed to forget, but he remains able to live a full life and be responsible to the creation of art, science and culture. Did his children ask questions about his past and why he moved away from the grandparents? Von Kellenbach would like to think so. That is where she places her role as third generation after the holocaust questioning the role the parents and grandparents (and other relatives) played during the Nazi period. I am part of the last generation in which apartheid was enforced. I move between empathy for my parents yet questioning their racist stance in terms of the politics after 1948 on the basis of the hurt and pain those policies caused in the black Other. It is part of my memory, labelling me a recovering racist. Like Cain, I am confronted with justice and its roughness. I am terrified, but like Von Kellenbach, I write about it in order to come to terms with it.

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