

Travels, Politics and Paul in the New Testament¹

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Abstract

This contribution on biblical travels focuses on the NT and Paul in particular, both regarding the significance of travel as a physical movement of people but also in terms of the related politics. Related to ancient and Jewish contexts, the NT's travel discourses unfold in relation to issues of identity, to socialisation and as displacement discourse within the Roman imperial context. In this regard, travels were co-constituted by maps and borders, then as much as today. NT travels and travel discourse had significant political implications for the past and continue to be invoked in modern, analogical discourses like migration.

Keywords: Apostle Paul; Displacement; Travel; Identity; Socialisation; Empire; Borders

Introduction

In an earlier contribution, I concluded that the prevalence of travel rhetoric in the New Testament (NT) requires attention for how this travel discourse is constructed, through boundaries, borders and mapping as elements in such discursive constructions (Punt 2022; see also 2018). A growing area of investigation in biblical research, the study of travel has garnered increased, if perhaps not quite adequate, attention, branching out beyond its well-worn use as literary motif (Uusimäki and Høgenhaven 2024:254–55). The focus here on the politics of biblical travels is not first and foremost situated in overt political claims about exercising power over others, or in covert, ideological posturing, but rather in the subtle invoking of identity concerns, raising issues of socialisation or enculturation, and of course boundaries, in the almost unobtrusive mapping out of space. Power and ideological claims soon follow, of course, but the first political steps of travels in the NT start with borders and boundaries as markers as well as constructors of space.

This contribution on biblical travels focuses on the NT and Paul in particular, both regarding the significance of travel as movement of people but also in terms of the related politics. It is situated in the broader context of debates and discussions of migrations today. Even though migration and larger people movements are today often viewed as exceptional, accidental and peripheral to a supposed normal course of history, and the effect of uncommon or extraordinary circumstances or events, migration has become a basic feature of social life throughout the world today (Benmayor and Skotnes 2005:4).²

¹ Edited version of a paper read at a REET/FVT/SU online colloquium on “Displacement and migrations of human populations: Philosophical, theological, and diaconal implications”, October 2023.

² For more detailed discussions on reasons for modern-day migrations, see the contributions in Portes and

The realisation of the ongoing impact of religion, directly and indirectly, in modern society has led some scholars of religion (Rytter and Olwig 2011b; Saunders, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, and Snyder 2016) and theologians (Cruz 2014; Padilla and Phan 2014b) to investigate intersections with migration.³ Religious practices tend to play a major role in migrant family- and kinship-like communities worldwide, assisting migrants to come to terms with new social settings by providing ways in which to maintain, create or recreate relations with people and places that they have had to leave behind (Rytter and Olwig 2011a, 24). Migrant people often imagine, sustain or create sentiments of belonging to a specific place, and conversely harbour the notion that the place belongs to them. Such relatedness resembles the constructed nature of family- and kinship-networks, and is dependent on emotions as much as statements and practices of morality, rights and obligations.⁴ However, religious practices not only cross some boundaries but also (re)establish others, which means also that religious practices can play both stabilising as well as destabilising roles.⁵ In the end, as Padilla and Phan (2014a:1) note, “migration cannot be fully understood without a serious and rigorous examination of how religious factors have played an influential role in it”.

NT and travel

The relationship between the New Testament and travel is strong. Travel and travellers are littered across the New Testament texts, as is evident from its range of travel related concepts. Reading through the NT, its texts recount endless movement.⁶ NT authors conceived of and scripted travels in various ways, rendering travels of different kinds, divine and human, collective and individual, coerced and voluntary, long-lasting and short-lived. The NT recounts how Joseph and Mary fled with Jesus to Egypt (Mt 2); later, Jesus and his disciples are constantly on the move. In the Synoptics, the movement is in the general direction of Jerusalem;⁷ finally the in-group flees (Mk 16), are send away (Mt 28) and Jesus departs (Lk 24).⁸ The movement (both as group and mobility)

DeWind (2007b), as well as the very useful introductory chapter (Portes and DeWind 2007a:3–26).

³ For a brief account of the role of migratory travel in the Islamic tradition, see e.g., Hussain (2014:173–86).

⁴ This ongoing negotiation of relatedness through stimulating spiritual ties typically strengthens existing family relations or offers alternative kin-like relationships. Religious practices can play a central role with notions of spiritual sisters or brothers (Rytter and Olwig 2011a:13).

⁵ “Although nation states have long sought to foster or impose religious homogeneity to unite their citizenry, diverse processes of international migration have sustained religious pluralism” (DeWind 2016:7).

⁶ The NT continues the biblical narrative on migration (Abraham, Joseph, the exodus) and is in line with other early Jewish interpretations of migration in Israel (Dead Sea Scrolls, rabbinic Midrash) and in Diaspora contexts (Philo, Josephus). Other travels, e.g., divine travels such as portrayals of Jesus Christ, or supra-human travels in other dimensions than in daily, physical reality (such as “a man”, maybe Paul himself, in 2 Cor 12:2–4), and with different agency (e.g. ἀπαγγέλλοντα in 2 Cor 12:2), are not considered here.

⁷ The transitory nature of the epistles is matched by the transitory situations of the Jesus-movement and their Jewish homeland settings in some gospels; e.g., the Lucan travel narrative (Lk 9:51–19:44) starts with the anticipation of Jesus’ ascension (Lk 9:51) and closes with his lament over Jerusalem (Lk 19:41–44), and Lk-Ac’s emphasis on hospitality is related to and invokes relations between stranger-native, insider-outsider, guest-host (Denaux 1999; also for the notion of divine travels or visits); cf Lk’s Jesus is homeless unlike Mk’s Jesus (Mk 2:1; 3:20).

⁸ Denaux (1999:255–79) identifies four aspects of divine travels in relation to human hospitality in Lk-Ac: ethics, with Lk presenting a position in tension with contemporary host-guest relationships (Lk 14:7–14 and 14:15–24); christological, with Jesus’ earthly life and ministry as divine visit (esp. Lk 9:51–19, 44); mission, where the disciples model Jesus’ ministry in an ecclesiological setting (Lk 9-10; Ac’s accounts on Paul); and, eschatological, hospitality as Lk’s metaphor for the Kingdom of God (Lk 13:22–30).

continues in Acts, after the scattering of people in various directions (Ac 8), especially through Peter initially and then Paul. The one designation of Jesus' followers in Acts, a reference to travelling, ἡ ὁδός (the Way, e.g. Ac 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4, and 24:13–14; cf. Jn 14:6) fits the profile. Even NT letters result from past travels or call forth future travels, and in themselves act as placeholders for actual travelling. The Pauline letters and legacy are framed by and shot through with travelling, or, to use a modern notion, migration.

Travels are hardly consistent or of an even nature across the corpus of NT documents. The variety is evident already in the portrayal of its best known traveller, since Jesus is homeless in Matthew and Luke, unlike the Markan version (Mk 2:1, 3:20; see Myles 2014).⁹ Also, in the NT, plotting travels according to conventional notions of an implied fixed centre as requirement for understanding travels is not always helpful. Even in ancient times, as Rozen (2008:27) notes, centres, peripheries and their interrelationships were ambivalent, “a push-pull dichotomy of yearning and rejection, that usually turned the center and the longing for it into a symbol, if it had not yet been forgotten”.¹⁰ Imposing modern frames of reference such as nation states and their accompanying ideological priorities on the historical settings of biblical texts only perpetuates anachronistic ideas of distant peripheries removed from a centre located elsewhere (Kitromilides 2008:324). The NT to some extent continues the Hebrew Bible narrative on migration (Abraham, Joseph, the exodus), and is in line with other early Jewish interpretations of migration in Israel (Dead Sea Scrolls, rabbinic Midrash) and in Diaspora contexts (Philo, Josephus)¹¹ – “[t]he Judeocentric focus of the movement began to shift when Jesus followers travelled beyond the bounds of Jewish territory” (Duff 2017:241). In Acts' portrayal, Jewish Jesus followers move to and settle in Antioch, a large Hellenistic city in Syria.¹² Common, if obvious, to such varied forms of movement were mapping and boundaries.

Travel, maps and boundaries

Travelling is guided by framing or mapping, but mapping is not restricted to collating and describing, assembling and explaining, arranging and understanding – even if such

⁹ Not only in the NT or eventually in Christianity, “Religion itself also has a long history of movement personified by, for instance, Christian missionaries, Sufi-sheiks and Buddhist monks, or materialized in the form of various routes and sites where devoted pilgrims have commemorated religious figures” (Rytter and Olwig 2011a:9).

¹⁰ “Modern nationalism rendered the problem more acute. It demanded identification of a center, loyalty toward it, and action on its behalf” (Rozen 2008:28).

¹¹ The NT documents are probably one set of indicators that “various factions of the early church were variations of a vast lateral Jewish migration. Thus these factions are not the opposite of Judaism but instead prove the width and range of Judaism in New Testament times. The early church, particularly in its multiformity, is typical of Judaism in the Hellenistic-Roman age” (Georgi 1995:65).

¹² “Jesus followers” is preferred to “(early) Christians”, since the latter is anachronistic. Notwithstanding the criticism that “Jesus followers” may introduce an anachronism of its own by creating the impression of an uninterrupted movement related to Jesus before and after his death (Georgi 1995:35–36, n1), the phrase avoids the connotations of a developed institutional structure of systems of belief, even an orthodoxy which the term “Christian” evokes. The suggestion that “the most substantial distinction that emerged between Jesus followers and their pagan neighbours centered on the honor that was believed due to the gods” is probably accurate; and so too that the Jesus followers “pledged their exclusive loyalty to the God that had heretofore only been worshipped by the Jews”. However, the notion that after “their conversion, they no longer honored the gods of their city and of the empire” (Duff 2017:245) may be too hasty a conclusion for the earliest Jesus follower groups in their contextual settings.

interests are included. Human beings are prone to classify, to structure, to arrange – to map out: “Maps are engines that convert social energy to social work” (Wood, Fels, and Krygier 2010:1). Far from being passive instruments that reflect positions, maps are active mechanisms. “Maps convert energy to work by linking things in space. They achieve their linkages by bringing together onto a common presentational plane propositions about territory. ... That is, maps achieve their linkages by putting selected things together onto a common plane” (Wood, Fels, and Krygier 2010:1–2).¹³ As much as NT travels depended on the mapped ancient world, they also contributed to its mapping. The Acts of the Apostles plotted the travels of Paul in particular, describing travel routes and destinies, often with a large amount of details, to give credence to Jesus’ words in Acts 1:8. The Pauline and other epistles are indicative of the sense of a mapped world in whose territories Jesus’ followers move around, while a broader cosmic mapping of travels is typical of the book of Revelation.

Beyond dealing with established categories, framing and mapping is also about wayfinding and navigation, direction-finding and course-plotting. Framing or mapping is therefore both relational and creative, constructing a relationship between two domains, and they do so by generating a secondary or codomain out of the potentialities of the originating domain. “Mapping is, then, an inherently creative process, giving rise to novel entities and insights. Precisely to the extent that the map *becomes* the territory, mapping generates whole new worlds of image, symbol or text” (Burrus 2007:1). It follows that, one, framing or mapping is necessarily an unstable, unpredictable and fragile process – frameworks and maps shift and cause shifts, seldom develop along fixed lines, and show signs of their tenuous and constructed nature.¹⁴ Two, as much as human beings “sort things out”, classify and structure life, such schemes and frameworks speak back, and at times, strike back.¹⁵ The organising formats people invent and use to assist them in making sense of life, have a way of imposing on their lives. The consequences of human mechanisms of classification are present in mapping, in the construction of boundaries and borders, and of course, travelling.

Physical, geographically plottable travels are embedded in and given meaning and significance through the construal of space. And the construal of space, as much as the occupation of space, is a political act. Both are indicative of ideological positions but also serves to contribute to ideological positions. What Edward Said (2002:186) said about exiles, “[m]ost people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is

¹³ For various studies on travel and geography in the sense of construction of the world(s) and conceptualising, see the essays in Adams and Laurence (2001).

¹⁴ Some heuristic approaches in particular, such as postcolonial work, would consider historical and also exegetical study of the NT as rendering basically unstable and incoherent results (see Penner and Lopez 2015, 65). Furthermore, it is the very normativity, historical criticism and aligned approaches’ conventionalism that establishes itself while insisting on its self-perpetuation, that postcolonial work contests.

¹⁵ Bowker and Star (1999) investigates different classification systems, to explore the role of categories and standards in shaping the modern world. Processes by which classification orders human interaction mostly happen unnoticed even if in different ways, although people can change the invisibility when necessary. Classification systems are not neutral, and their moral agenda is situated in how every standard and category privileges certain points of view and silences others, and how standards and classifications produce advantage or suffering. Classification systems determined how people think and assess objects, others, and themselves, and make moral and political choices.

contrapuntal”, can be expanded more broadly to (other) travellers, too.¹⁶ Weissenrieder (2016:1–15), although she focusses more on spatialised boundaries of structures, takes her cue for making sense of borders from German sociologist Georg Simmel, arguing that borders are not territory-reliant but that border is a sociological fact and border zone a communicative phenomenon. Borders typically are invested in linear, spatial limits, and as such, their primary significance is often to express mutual proportionality. Borders’ demarcation role is a function typical of human communication. As a spatial matter with social consequences, “while demarcation divides two elements, as a limit it also combines them with each other” so that the border itself becomes a liminal position¹⁷ (Weissenrieder 2016:2). Borders are constructed entities serving purposes beyond themselves, and they structure space rather than occupy space. Although used interchangeably with border, Weissenrieder (2016:7) prefers “boundary”, which for her “signifies a demarcation, a limitation or constraint, which can be geographical, cultural, ethnic or religious”.¹⁸ But boundaries of course not only mark out but also construe and construct space, and create (the possibility) of travels, as can be seen in Pauline travels.¹⁹

Paul, travels and identity

The NT’s portrayals of Jesus’ followers as “the Way” and those associated with Jesus Christ as “followers” (among other renderings) underscore the dynamic self-understanding of the movement during that era. While Paul’s travels were certainly not entirely unique, they were generally more extensive in their reach and broader in their scope compared to many others. Pauline travel discourse is to be understood in connection with how texts frame the space in which such travels took place. Paul actively constructed the world which he addressed in his letters, including the different situational contexts of his letters, their socio-cultural and theological frameworks, and the tensions between the community of faithful and the world portrayed in the texts. The traditional, summary dismissal of κόσμος and κτίσις as negative for Paul is too simplistic. Adams’ (2000:246) conclusion that “Pauline symbolizations served to *create* community, not primarily to *reflect* it” is accurate but limited – the letters created not only the communities’ symbolic universe but also the broader world, as they were addressing it.²⁰

¹⁶ “[D]iasporas are human inventions that can be understood only if studied along the entire time axis of their existence, or at least, as far back as we can go” (Rozen 2008:32).

¹⁷ Weissenrieder (2016:2, 6) translates Simmel’s “Indifferenzzustand von Defensive und Offensive” as “a condition of indifference between defence and offence”. She also shows upon the distinction between borders as invoked by nation state concepts, in contrast to “frontier” as the outlying aboriginal areas which signified both limits and possibility of movement, where “political power can only be used peripherally”.

¹⁸ Weissenrieder (2016:7) also quotes Paasi’s notion that “Boundaries are understood as structures that are produced, reproduced and contested in and between territorially bounded groupings of people”. Boundaries of course are not limited to spatial notions, and in migration discourse, gender constitutes a particularly important boundary, see e.g. Ryan and Vacchelli (2013:1–5). On the feminisation of migration as such, see Tittensor and Mansouri (2017:11–25).

¹⁹ While some theoretical investigations acknowledge the reciprocal value of modern-day migration and biblical travels studies, especially regarding maps and boundaries, the scholarly conversation’s imposition of discursive boundaries on these investigations warrants further investigation.

²⁰ With an apocalyptic frame of reference in 1 Corinthians, the social and ideological tension between the Jesus community and the world is stressed; emphasising the world as God’s good creation, and lesser (but not absent) apocalyptic strain, social harmony and good citizenship characterise Romans; proselytising tensions appear to highlight social and religious disunions among Jesus followers in Galatians; but in 2 Corinthians, no specific ideological or social tension seems to determine the use of κόσμος, even if κτίσις is used for

And pointing to such constructive endeavours in the letters aligns with current emphases in migration studies: the negotiation of identity, and socialisation or acculturation, both of which, together with the ancient hegemonic context, illuminate Pauline travels.

Pauline travelling and identity

According to its own founding narratives, the Jesus-movement was migratory from its earliest beginnings – a “movement” in more than one sense – invoking traditions and narratives of ancient Israel in support of its migratory nature. In its increasingly diasporic settings, the Jesus movement relied on and developed interpretive traditions that focused on the movement’s itinerant nature. As far as the Pauline letters are concerned, the travelling nature of these early writings’ understanding of a relationship of faith in Christ is evident, and the understanding of this relation is bolstered further by reliance upon the Scriptures of Israel. In fact, the explicit or embedded use of Israel’s Scriptures in the understanding, but also further development, of the formulation or construction and negotiation of a “new identity” in relation to Christ, on the one hand, can be traced through the Pauline letters. Paul valued his Jewish identity, even where he redeployed and re-evaluated his Jewishness (e.g. Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5–6; Gal 1:13–17) (see recently Fredriksen 2024). The role played by Genesis, and the itinerant Abraham-narratives in particular, in the framing of the identity of Jesus-followers by Paul comes as no surprise.²¹ His discursive concern with travels connects intertextually with migration in Israel’s Scriptures and in other Jewish interpretive traditions. In recalling the Abraham stories, as for example in Gal 3–4 and Rom 4, Paul traces a common thread from the past to the experienced realities of the present through both continuities and breaches, so that the story about Abraham as told by Paul is neither stable nor closed (see Lieu 2004:97).²²

The Roman period was characterised by high levels of interregional movement and fluid identity transformations. Evidence reveals significant complexity, which meant that not everyone who dressed and behaved like an outsider was necessarily an immigrant in the dynamic social groupings that emerged (e.g. Killgrove 2010). This was certainly true for Paul’s role in the developing Jesus movement as well, given especially the robust Jewish setting and continuing influence on Paul and others. The strong invocation of the narratives of ancient Israel and Paul’s intimate association with his Jewish identity cast some doubt on Pauline scholarship’s penchant to make sense of the ancient Greek terms Ἰουδαϊσμός or Ἰουδαῖοι by yielding to early Christian identity studies’ tendency to focus on religious separation between Judaism and Christianity (see Holmberg 2008; also Mason 2007). The appropriateness of the use of terms like “early Christian” and “early Judaism”, which some scholars defend (Holmberg 2008:3–5; see Runesson 2008:59–

emphasising the ideological boundaries of the Jesus community (see E. Adams 2000:85–237).

²¹ Trebilco (2012:270) relates the use of ὁδός in Ac to the Scriptures (Isa 40:3). The NT designation of followers of Jesus as ὁδός (the Way, e.g. Ac 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4, and 24:14, 22) is of course more than reference to travels, but boils down to an important designation of the identity of Jesus followers (e.g. Trebilco 2012:247–71). However, how the followers of Jesus would fill in this metaphorical self-description in developments towards taking up the name Christianity (Ac 11:26) is not always clear in Acts or, for that matter, in the rest of the NT.

²² The outstanding matter of the (different ways of?) understanding intertextuality with regard to the Scriptures of Israel, in relation to ethnic identity, in ancient Israel and among Second Temple Jews, has to be addressed elsewhere.

92), is hotly debated, while even the suitability of terms like “Christian” or “Judaism” in the first century are questioned (e.g. Becker and Reed 2007; Lieu 2002; see Mason 2007).

This is not to rule out the importance of binary thinking in ancient identity constructions and negotiations. Granted, in the first-century Roman world, binary thinking regarding identity was less typical than what the case was among Greeks and Jews. The Romans were more aware of human diversity, and contrasts made with other peoples as barbarians were mostly on basis of “cultural deficiencies” rather than “with ethnic difference per se” (Stanley 2011:125). Nevertheless, the binary model served identity claims and formulations well, since identity was constructed in contrast, if not always opposition, to the Other. As Collar (2013:30) explains for the Greeks, it was “precisely the act of confrontation between the colonisers and the new people, cultures and religions in the places they colonised that articulated how Greeks saw themselves, and which drive the formation of what came to be understood as collective ‘Greek’ identity”. To some extent, at least, this is true of the travelling Paul and his letters as well: the letters’ theological reasoning and moral exhortation took place in the first-century’s whirlpool of change, and are testimony to a concern to negotiate, and at times, to impose, a specific identity framework on the addressees of the letters.

Pauline travelling and socialization

The first-century Jesus movement was in many ways related to other Jewish groups, although it should probably not be seen as a Jewish sect in the way Pharisaism was (see Meeks 1985:106). Traditionally, it has been concluded that through its internal diversity and apart from Jewish acculturation in the Greek-infused Roman world, “in the long run the gentile world was marginal to the religious cosmos of virtually all Jews in antiquity” (Goldenberg 1997:52, 99–107). From a Jewish perspective, however, there was much more diversity in Jewish attitudes to Gentiles and their religious practices, including high levels of tolerance, than what is often acknowledged.²³ Jewish groups, like other first-century groups, including the Jesus movement, maintained connections with the homeland and its cultural ways, including devotion to the “ancestral gods”.²⁴ “Judean gatherings were, therefore, not alone as ethnic groups with their own distinctive customs and identities that set them apart in certain ways from other groups in the same social setting” (Harland 2009:183). Although the Jesus-movement laid no claim to any homeland or ancestral god, Paul at least took his Jewish context seriously, to the extent of going out of his way to garner support for the Jerusalem community (espec 2 Cor 8–9). However, the maintenance of ethnic identities and connections to the homeland, while integrating with host societies, questions traditional notions of rootlessness and detachment among the ancient Mediterranean’s immigrant populations.²⁵

²³ Acculturation is the process of adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture, typically the dominant one, in order to assimilate into it. Philo is a good example of strong acculturation, and he “represents a form of Judaism which had come to terms with a high degree of social-cultural and political assimilation and acculturation. Furthermore it accommodated Judaism to the dominant culture via practices such as allegorical interpretation without abandoning its distinctive traditions and practices” (Winston 1981:12).

²⁴ Minority groups such as Jewish sects and the Jesus movement “also engaged in similar techniques of internal self-definition through stereotyping the ‘other,’ including other associations” (Harland 2009:184–85).

²⁵ Harland (2009:183) offers the case of the Judean family at Hierapolis as an example of how both cultural maintenance as well as certain forms of integration within the local society was possible for cultural minority groups. Various affiliations and several identities were possible for the Glykon family, evidently also for the

Not unlike identity issues emerging from Paul's migratory life, the presence and extent of acculturation in his letters reveal more about the apostle than the communities he addressed. While Paul's Jewishness was primary, other traditions deriving from the broader first-century Hellenistic setting also feature in Paul's writings, since they probably influenced his thinking. Some scholars argue that as far as acculturation to the Hellenistic world was concerned, "Paul makes little attempt to translate the traditional biblical language of covenant and election into the idiom of Graeco-Roman culture" (Barclay 1995:108).²⁶ Barclay describes Paul as a diaspora Jew, highly assimilated (i.e., socially integrated), but comparatively low in acculturation (his mastery of Hellenistic education and Greek) as well as accommodation (subscribing to the Hellenistic conceptual framework). Other scholars, however, have emphasised the opposite, also by showing Paul's invocation and even use of some of the Hellenistic traditions as an indication of his acculturation. Scholars then point to Paul's extensive use of the "philosophic tradition of pastoral care" (Malherbe 1987), or his use of other "non-Jewish traditions" such as Menander in 1 Cor 15:33 (Tuckett 1991:309). The explicit claims regarding assimilation in, for example, 1 Cor 9:20–23, may be further testimony not only to rhetorical finesse in the interest of his mission, but an indication of Pauline (aspiration to) acculturation. So too does Pauline vitriol against "judaising" (Gal 2) raise the question of whether only religious convictions are of concern here, or whether such polemic need not also be understood in light of acculturation – especially where religion was not primarily a matter of cognitive content but of active practice, in an imperial context.

Pauline travelling in imperial times

Some biblical views of travel involved not only cultural imposition but also enlisted support for political and economic submission to an empire, elements interlinked with religious sentiment.²⁷ The push and pull of empire meant that the imperial framework rubbed off and may go some way towards explaining the forceful language or messages communicated by Paul in referring to his travels to the communities he addressed. Paul could exert pressure, such as in Philemon where he asks that a room be prepared in expectation of his visit there (22), ostensibly to ensure that Onesimus is dealt with as ἀδελφὸν ἀγαπητόν (16). In other instances, the threat is pronounced, such as in 1 Cor 4:21 (ἐν ῥάβδῳ ἔλθω πρὸς ὑμᾶς). In fact, many Pauline letters refer to completed and impending visits. It remains to ask about the letters of Paul themselves: to what extent do these documents serve Pauline travels not only in the cause of identity (if perhaps not for acculturation) but also imperialism? Are they in some sense exporting pre-packaged knowledge to "the colonies" for dissemination and adapting while dismissing the indigenous, home-grown as unimportant, secondary, of lesser quality? Not only were

primarily non-Jewish organisations or guilds who explicitly evoked his memory on Jewish as well as Roman holidays.

²⁶ Barclay (1995:118) examines him in his first-century Jewish context, and concludes that Paul was seen by his fellow Jews as an apostate, a "label [which] fits historical reality".

²⁷ In biblical studies, the mission narratives of many biblical texts (and the cultures that carried the texts with them on their journeys) can often be read as imperialist, sanctioning authoritative travelers and reducing all nations to obedient student disciples of Jesus or the apostles (and, thus, their new representatives among the colonisers) (Dube 2000:140–41).

Empire and migration cross-linked and the one dependent upon and regulated by the other, but they both appear to have left their mark on Paul as traveller, the migrant apostle.

As was explained more fully elsewhere, a popular colonial trope was travel to distant lands and to triumph over indigenous people (Punt 2015:145–47). In 1 Thessalonians, Paul refers to his experiences in Philippi (2:2), encounters with assemblies in Judea (2:14), and the Thessalonian community's role in Achaia and Macedonia (1:7–8). In 2:18, Paul expresses his frustration at not having been able to visit the Thessalonians but refers to Timothy who travelled as Paul's substitute.²⁸ The apocalyptic nature of Paul's letters helps to clarify how Paul was using conquering travel. On the one hand, apocalyptic, with its ultimate, final, radical scenarios presents divine conquering travels (4:14–17), sudden and unexpected (5:2). On the other hand, Paul presents himself as the eminent emissary, as the ultimate traveller within an apocalyptic context collecting and leading the others toward the final journey (4:16–17). Even as he offers praise for and appeals to communal love and support (4:9–12) in their own land, it is in anticipation of "conquering" other communities that Paul travelled and invited others to follow suit (as 1:8 seems to suggest that this already happened). While these and other images could be viewed as anti-imperial in one sense, Paul still tends to speak on the same terms as the empire, repeating or perhaps perpetuating an imperial discourse—and in the process he does not so much destabilise the empire as he replaces it with another.

Conclusion

After years of neglect, a new appreciation for ancient mobility and its significance is emerging, possibly influenced by modern developments given that migration is a pervasive aspect of modern social life (Benmayor and Skotnes 1994:4). As popular opinion and official government responses continue to treat migrations as isolated, random events, they fail to consider how various interventions stimulate migration. Such responses feeds into portrayals of immigrant identities as dangerous, deviant, and disruptive, while nation states are idealised as culturally homogeneous and territorially distinct.²⁹ Quite detrimental for understanding the connection between text and migration is the longstanding definition of migration as a single movement in time and space toward assimilation (see Benmayor and Skotnes 2005:3–11).³⁰ Modern views of migratory phenomena tend to mirror the study of ancient migration, and explains the slow development of systematic ancient migration studies (e.g. De Ligt and Tacoma 2016)³¹ and the lack of migration-related readings in NT texts despite traveling's

²⁸ Earlier, the Thessalonians themselves had apparently also travelled (1:8). The letter itself forms part of Paul's broader program of missionary travels, acting as substitute for Paul's conquering presence and maintaining the dominance of his voice as expressed in the letter. See Stirewalt (2003) on the nature of Paul's letters, particularly their formal, ambassadorial style, and on the authority Paul assumed in the letters.

²⁹ Claims on "biblical perspectives" on migration, that the Bible "speaks clearly on public policy" and finding the challenge in the "conundrum of finding and applying the right, timeless principles to a modern policy issue in a specific nation" (Edwards 2009) are, notwithstanding the good intentions, neither helpful nor responsible.

³⁰ Koet (2006: espec 11–24) points to the fluctuating situations of migration in Lk-Ac, as narrated (persecution Ac 8:1; 11:19; mission; and political trial Ac 22:22–28:31) and as envisioned (war Lk 21:8–36; references to Jewish diaspora communities and the influx of Gentiles in these communities).

³¹ The contributions in De Ligt and Tacoma (2016) work from the assumption that state-organised, forced (including slaves and conscripts) and voluntary (e.g., merchants or traders) mobility and migration were

centrality in them.³² Recent theoretical positions may assist in escaping from impasses induced by conventional theoretical and methodological positions. Collar, for example, presents network theory as an approach with which to understand religious diffusion in the Roman Empire, believing that an “ultra-modern” theory can illuminate the ancient world. Network theory is grounded in connectivity, “the power of the dynamic, fluid *interactions* that form and dissolve networks to affect cultural change and influence the success and failure of ideas” (Collar 2013:1).³³

While acknowledging the differences between traveling and migration, the similarities caution against dismissing NT texts for migration. Neglecting the NT and early Christian source materials for migration may stem from different conceptual frameworks, when hermeneutic-theological frameworks prioritise scholarly and other sectional interests over a comprehensive understanding.³⁴ In the end it is not so much about a particular theoretical approach, but rather about hermeneutical accountability. Here Gaertner’s (2007:20) argument on exile, that its treatment “depends not so much on personal experience as on literary, and more generally cultural, canons”, is equally appropriate for migration – past and present. In fact, vastly different perceptions pertaining to geography as much as to peoples require commensurate respect for different understanding and framing of travel in general and migration, in particular, in ancient times.³⁵

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interlinked and need to be considered together. Paul probably was aware of the banishment or exile of the Jewish community from Rome under Claudius in 49 CE, and in any case shared in ancient Israel’s narrative of enslavement in and exodus from Egypt (e.g. 1 Cor 10:1–5; cf Rom 8:18–29), and Israel’s exile (e.g. use of Isa 52 in Rom 2:24; 10:15; 15:21).

- ³² The broader context for NT texts is probably the relocation settings of Jewish Diaspora communities as portrayed in contemporary literature such as Philo (*Embassy* 155–6, 281–2) and Josephus (*JW* 7.43–45; *Ag Ap* 1.186; *Ant* 14.114–118). Though traveling was less common and not a daily occurrence in ancient times, most people would have been familiar with travellers or those who had met them (Laurence 2001–169).
- ³³ Two other emerging concerns cannot be addressed here: Travelling and agency (losing voice in strange contexts; need to establish oneself, to find voice again – to what extent was this an issue in ancient times? Maybe “having voice” was differently conceived in ancient times), and communities and the value of staying put (the trouble[s] with travelling, matters such as hospitality, etc).
- ³⁴ When travels are addressed, they often portray romanticised journeys of discovery and sentimentalised missionary travels that prioritise the travellers’ ideological convictions, neglecting their migratory significance.
- ³⁵ And, to add to literary and cultural canons, the interrelationships between scholarship and its national settings are complex and fraught with difficulties (Whitelam 2011).

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