Introduction

In the 2008 presidential elections, candidates from both parties struggled to demonstrate the differences in their positions on the pertinent issues in order to distinguish themselves from their opponents. To win votes and elections they discursively demonstrated that their positions on issues aligned with voters' opinions. Candidates constructed and capitalized on differences between themselves and their opponents in order to minimize similarities. Candidates discursively constructed their opposition as the other. This othering was manifested in the categorizing, name calling, and demonization of others with similar convictions in order to portray them as absolutely other. Candidates represented their opponents as immoral, uncaring, lacking the talents and/or experience for the job, unsafe, palling around with terrorists, *inter alia*.

Of course, this othering continues beyond the election season. And with the election of the first African-American U.S. President and the seating of a Democratic majority in the house and senate, the public and discursive construction of otherness among opponents has ratcheted up. For example, during the health care debate, the discursive construction of otherness cluttered the mediasphere, the blogosphere, the Twittersphere, and other social network sites with intensity. Some Democrats, the president and his administration, and supporters of health care reform have become the immoral and annihilating enemy who want to kill grandma and invade the lives of Americans. They are described as anti-American, Hitler-like, socialists, baby killers, communists, and ultimately demonic. Likewise, some Republicans and teapartyers were labeled as categorically racist, self-serving, greedy, "Republican Rhinos," hate mongers, and satanic as well.

This othering takes place within the larger context of the worst recession since the Great Depression and the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. In this context, people are trying to preserve for themselves a sense of identity (or shape a new and viable one) amidst these global and

mundane challenges affecting our lives (i.e., job losses, foreclosures, threat of terrorism [domestic and foreign], and an uncertain future). People want to know how their lives might change for better or worse in this uncertain and threatening climate. Some people are experiencing an identity crisis, and certainly our nation is at a decisive and redefining moment, and the choices made will determine our place in the world and how we are perceived globally. Within this context, a redefining of self takes place over against a demon within and a demon without; us against them.

Othering in politics is often theologically framed, and othering among Christians is inherently political. One day after the earthquake in Haiti and before the ground had stopped trembling and the dust could settle, some Christian leaders hastened to demonize the Haitian people while many still lay trapped and buried alive under ruble and concrete and singing the praises of God. Even as the Haitians expressed their hope in God amidst devastation upon devastation, some Christians in America were accusing them of being devil worshippers. One blogger stated that the four apocalyptic horsemen had been unleashed over Haiti and that, through the practice of "voodoo" and witchcraft,[1] the devil is strategically subduing Haiti.[2] And that same day, January 13, 2010, of course, Televangelist Pat Robertson declared that Haiti had made a "pact with the devil" years ago. To which the Honorable Raymond Joseph, Haitian Ambassador to the U.S., rebuffed that one of the greatest beneficiaries of Haiti's so-called pact with the devil was the U.S., which consequently purchased the Louisiana territories for fifteen cents an acre.[3] Jonathan Z. Smith argues that "[t]he issue of problematic similarity or identity seems to be particularly prevalent in religious discourse and imagination."[4] Smith further asserts that the demonization of someone against her/his will who is considered as estranged is restricted to "Christian texts [and contexts] that represent a unique attempt to overcome similarity rather than the perception of dissimilarity."[5]

1. For an informative and brief article on Vodou in response to the demonization of Haitian religious practices, see Diakité, "Myth of 'Voodoo.'"
2. Kaylania, "Earthquake in Haiti."
3. Maddow, "Haitian Ambassador."
4. Smith, "Differential Equations," 245.
5. Smith, "Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers," 428.

Too often we resort to constructing difference between those who are like us but whom we do not understand and cannot control. Otherness is "a description of interaction" according to Smith. He argues that a project of otherness, othering, is more often than not about proximity and not about absolute difference. Otherness is about proximity and not alterity; the other who is most like us is most threatening and most problematic. Rarely is the radically, absolute other of concern to us, but we are most concerned with the other who is too similar.[6] Difference is constructed in order to distinguish ourselves from proximate others. Our constructions of the other generally function to subordinate the other to us. Projects of othering are linguistic or discursive, evaluative, hierarchical, and they are "essentially political and economic."[7]

When we construct images of ourselves over against an other, we will go to great lengths to preserve our constructed self-identities as well as our representations of others, since in a project of othering we create our identities on the backs of or in opposition to our representations of others. This construction of otherness occurs in written texts as well as in public discourse. Otherness gets inscribed in both fictional and nonfictional texts. We more expect or readily accept how characters are represented in fictional works as synthetic or constructed. But we do not expect, or we find it difficult to accept, that characterizations in sacred texts might be synthetic constructions and mimetic representations of real people. Sacred texts produced by fallible humans, mediated through human language and culture, and arising out of human situatedness, are no less likely to represent projects of othering or to construct otherness, consciously or unconsciously. Often otherness gets reinscribed and fossilized or codified in texts, especially sacred texts. And we tend to uncritically imbibe those literary and discursive constructions of stereotyped and politicized others. Those images likely become foundations for how we view others in the real world. We impose or reinscribe the stereotyped and demonized other upon our world and the world of others, many times unwittingly and sometimes consciously.

When we read a text, we enter the constructed world of the text. The world of the text is a constructed literary cosmos that reflects and reflects upon a real world. In the beginning, God gave humans the power to re-create or to contribute to the continued construction of

6. Smith, "Differential Equations," 256, 259.
7. Smith, "What a Difference," 253, 259, 275.

our world—to till, to plant, and to multiply. This power to construct our worlds did not cease with the entrance of sin, and thus our fallibility is imprinted upon the worlds we construct. No less in the world of a text, even in the biblical text, we find the imprint of human fallibility on the world constructed within the text. When we read, we enter into a fallible world, and we are confronted with fallible characters; the only infallible one is God who precedes and transcends the text. "Doubtless God is by no means man [or woman]. He is the other, the absolutely other. . . . Human language can only ever speak of him in approximate terms or by homonymy."[8]

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke[9] constructs a world. The world that Luke constructs centers on the story of how the eleven apostles and other disciples continued the Jesus movement after his ascension. It is the story of how that nucleus of believers gathered in an upper room to wait on the Holy Spirit that the Father promised would be poured upon them to empower them as God's witnesses. It is the story of how after the Holy Spirit anointed them, they witnessed about how God raised Jesus, they baptized believers who accepted Jesus as the Messiah, and they gathered the new believers into a community/communities that became known as the *ekklēsias* (usually translated "church," but throughout this book I will primarily use this term to represent the early assembly of believers who later became an institutional church).[10] Acts is the story of the beginnings of the Christian church; it is about how the early believers became a unified koinonia; it is about how they constituted themselves and began shaping a self-identity. And this self-identity was formed over against others, beginning with the selection of Judas' replacement, if not sooner. Judas' replacement had to be a male who accompanied the eleven and Jesus from the event of his baptism by John until his ascension (1:21–25).

Historically, some church fathers and others have used passages and images from the book of Acts to distinguish orthodox Christians from heretical others. François Bovon notes that in the third century Tertullian (ca. 160–220) used the canonical book of Acts polemically in

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8. Benbassa and Attias, *Jew and the Other*, 10.

9. Throughout the book I refer to the author of Luke-Acts as Luke.

10. See Acts 19:32–40 where *ekklēsia* is translated "assembly" in the NRSV and refers to a formal and informal secular gathering. Schüssler Fiorenza (*Power of the Word*, 10) notes that *ekklēsia* is primarily a political and not a religious term.

his opus *Against Marcion*. Bovon further notes that Acts was less useful among early Christian communities but "only became important later, when it was necessary to base correct doctrine on the teaching and career of some of the apostles."[11] And Cyprian (third-century North African bishop), Bovon asserts, mined the quarry of Acts for the multiple quotations that supported his *Testimonia against the Jews* (*Test.* 1.21 quotes from 13:46b–47 Paul's exclamation of turning to the Gentiles).[12] Cyprian refers to Acts as a "scriptural authority" when he uses it in a doctrinal controversy over the (in)validity of baptism received by heretics wanting to join the catholic church.[13] It is likely because of Luke's construction of the Jews as the other that Arator, the sixth-century orator and subdeacon in Rome, referred to the Jews as "savage men" in his commentary on Acts.[14] Many interpreters of the biblical text, ancient and modern, have reinscribed and appropriated characterizations of groups such as *the Jews* or the Pharisees in polemical, didactic, and kerygmatic discourses unchallenged and without qualification.

Again, othering has to do with interaction among groups, and it is about constructing ourselves over against others. In Acts, interaction is inherent to the story of the dissemination of the gospel. Othering in Acts is exacerbated by the fact that the primary plot of the narrative takes place within the framework of expansionism ("to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the end of the earth," 1:8) both in familiar and unfamiliar territory, among peoples who are similar or proximate even in the diaspora (i.e., in synagogues, where Paul dialogues with both Jews and Godfearing Gentiles). The construction of the other has to do with the drawing of boundaries in order to clearly distinguish between them and us. The drawing of boundaries becomes necessary because of any fluidity or similarity that exists between them and us. Othering involves the obliteration of sameness and the foregrounding and/or construction of difference.

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11. Bovon, "Reception of Acts, " 74. While Cyprian (middle third century), following Tertullian, uses the phrase "in the Acts of the Apostles," he only once considers an Acts quotation as an excerpt from "Scripture" (ibid., 75).

12. Ibid., 74

13. Ibid., 76. Cyprian favored (re)baptism since the first baptism was not a true baptism (Cyprian, *Epist.* 72).

14. Arator, *On Acts*, 43.

In the prologue of Luke's Gospel (1:1–4), he inscribes in the text a dichotomy of otherness between the "many" and himself ("me"). Both Luke and the "many" have written narratives about Jesus' deeds based on eyewitness accounts. Luke's project of othering is prompted by the existence of other accounts on the same subject. Luke further evaluates his narrative as "more accurate," and this evaluation gives Luke's readers the impression that his Gospel constitutes objective truth and is therefore superior to other accounts. Thus, the motivation given for writing Luke's narrative is based on sameness and the need to distinguish his Gospel from the narratives of the "many." This evaluation applies to both Luke and Acts. The reference to the *first* book at Acts 1:1 connects Acts to Luke's Gospel as its sequel. Thus, the inscribed audience in Acts (Theophilus) and some contemporary readers should apply Luke's evaluation of his Gospel as objective truth ("more accurate") to Acts as well. By contending that Luke-Acts is objective truth in the sense of being more accurate and able to transmit "truthfulness," Luke rhetorically constructs, communicates, and inscribes otherness. As stated above, a theory of otherness is political in that it creates hierarchical relationships. In this case the hierarchical relationship is between "many" other narratives and Luke-Acts. This othering project extends beyond the prologue.

In addition to the boundaries drawn between proximate others who are differentiated and identified as outside of the collective, a second boundary is marked. Jonathan Boyarin asserts that the second boundary lies "between the collective with which one is conventionally identified and the presumably alien collective Other."[15] For example, most named women in Acts are identified with the collective *ekklēsia* as believers, but their gender also identifies them as the "alien collective Other," or the internal other.[16] My goal is to demonstrate how characters are constructed as internal and external others in the book of Acts. Characters who are considered or who become insiders, acknowledged believers, and/or members of the Jesus movement but who are in some way marginalized constitute *internal others*. Internal others are generally passive in relation to the apostles; but external others act more aggressively when compared to the apostles. *External others* consist of characters that remain fully or partially outside of the Jesus

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15. Boyarin, "Other Within," 433.
16. See Wills, *Insiders and Outsiders*, 205.

movement and who are stereotypically depicted as hostile others in relation to the apostles despite their religious and functional proximity. Both external and internal others function as a foil for the construction of self-identity for the apostles and other approved intermediaries. Stereotypical images of proximate others are weaved into the fabric of Acts. Readers encounter a constructed or represented world of character interaction. The witnesses of the gospel mission, as approved intermediaries, interact with other characters, their proximate others. As characters interact, Luke constructs and foregrounds difference between the approved intermediaries and three groups: charismatics, the Jews, and women. Constructions of otherness are inscribed in the text, and if we are not careful we accept constructions of others, of otherness, as infallible and pure. Consequently we reinscribe that otherness, the constructed stereotypical and demonized other, into our worlds. This has been particularly true in the case of women and Jewish persons. Women whose lives and actions do not fully coincide with literary and discursive constructions of women in the biblical text as submissive, silent, or subordinate are considered as walking outside of God's will. Jewish persons who do not accept their collective blame for the death of Jesus and opposition to the apostolic mission are in denial and continue to be blamed and damned.

Too often our self-identity as Christians relies upon our readings of the inscription of otherness in the biblical text. If that foundation is shaken, if the other is deconstructed so that she is no longer the reliable foil against whom we understand ourselves, our whole theological and ontological house, we fret, might crumble. We find it difficult, if not impossible, to communicate about ourselves without talking about others whom we have determined are nothing like us. We are not like the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Jews, the Romans, the Philistines, or the Jezebels. And as Virginia Domínquez argues, our representation of the other belongs to us; we author them.[17] The other we have constructed is our creation, and no one else, not even the other herself, can redefine her; she is exactly how we have constructed her, and what she has to say about her own identity is irrelevant and false. We do not want anyone to tamper with what we have constructed because in so doing they meddle with the identity we have constructed for ourselves. I once had a student in an Acts class assert that anyone who refused to sign her pro-life

17. Domínguez, *People as Subject*, 157–58.

petition was not a Christian. Many Christians, black and white, voted for Bush's second term as president solely on the grounds of the abortion issue. It became the defining factor of their Christianity over against the pro-choice advocates, and little else mattered.

In this book, I employ Smith's theory of otherness as a framework for analyzing Luke's literary and discursive construction of character in Acts. In chapter 1 I examine how Luke has constructed charismatic others (so-called magicians) over against the approved intermediaries of the gospel mission. Charismatic others are proximate others who function like approved intermediaries but whom Luke constructs as external others in order to demonstrate the superiority of the approved intermediates and to form a self-identity for the *ekklēsia* and its leadership. In chapter 2 I continue to explore how Luke constructs an identity for the approved intermediaries, but this chapter focuses on the characterization of *the Jews* as the external other. I also demonstrate how Paul's three declarations about turning toward the Gentiles constitute a dialectic of abandonment and remaining, and create a narrative tension that is unresolved when the narrative ends. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on Luke's construction of women in relation to apostles Peter and Paul, respectively. I continue to use a theory of otherness as a framework for examining how Luke constructs women as the internal other to enhance the identity of apostles as approved intermediaries and to redeem Peter from negative portrayals of him in Luke's Gospel. Women are primarily situated in narrative instabilities involving disorder, but they never have a say in the restoration of order. The ordering of the community and the restoration of order remains the privilege of approved intermediaries, and they are male.

In this study I generally bracket attempts at historical reconstruction, but I employ extra-biblical sources comparatively and dialogically. In other words, extra-biblical sources sometimes provide analogs for insightful dialogue with the book of Acts. I am concerned primarily with a close narrative or literary reading of Acts as a unified text. This study does not concern itself with source-critical questions, even though I engage scholarly interpretations that are based on source criticism.

In addition to a theory of otherness, I also employ ergative-based transitivity analysis to highlight transitive agency. An ergative-based transitivity analysis differs from a simple transitivity analysis, primar-

ily in terms of perspective.[18] A simple transitivity analysis concerns whether or not an action extends to an object beyond the acting subject. For example, in the sentence "Napria threw the ball," the verb "threw" extends to the object/noun "ball." The verb is therefore transitive and the action extends to someone or something. We identify "Napria" as the participant-actor and "the ball" as an inanimate participant-object. The action is a material process, namely, doing something to someone or something beyond the subject-actor.

Both ergative and simply transitivity models are concerned with whether or not there are one or two participants (participant-actor and/or participant-object) in the clause. However, the primary issue in the ergative-based transitivity model is whether the participant involved in the process is the same one who engenders the process or whether the process is caused by another entity. An ergative-based transitivity model focuses on causation.[19] For example, in the sentence "The boat set sail," the grammar does not tell us who caused the boat to sail. In the sentence "*The Jews* aroused the crowd," we can say that *the Jews* as participant-actor caused *the crowd* as participant-object to be aroused; *the Jews* acted in a material way upon *the crowd* as participant-object. Ergative material processes express the highest degree of transitive agency. Causative agency can be obscured by passive constructions, by circumstantial elements, or by embedded speech acts. Transitivity analysis can aid in answering more precisely these questions: Who does what and to whom? What kind and degree of agency do the characters portray? And how do these depictions contribute to the structure and resolution of the narrative instabilities?[20] Transitivity analysis shows that when the apostles are inserted into narrative instabilities with external others, the apostles are passive displaying the lowest level of transitive agency when compared to *the Jews* and charismatic others. The apostles are primarily the participant-objects, while the external others are the participant-actors. More often the apostles' agency is expressed in performative speech acts. While speech is central to the agency of approved intermediaries, speech or the muting of speech contributes to women's marginalization.

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18. Halliday, *Introduction*, 154–59.

19. Ibid., 145, 149; also Halliday, *Explorations*, 36–44.

20. Phelan, *Reading People*, 15, 91.

I hope that this study will at least provoke critical thinking about how character is constructed in Acts and how those constructions might become reinscribed into contemporary discourse about Christian identity and in our public theological discourse in non-liberating ways.