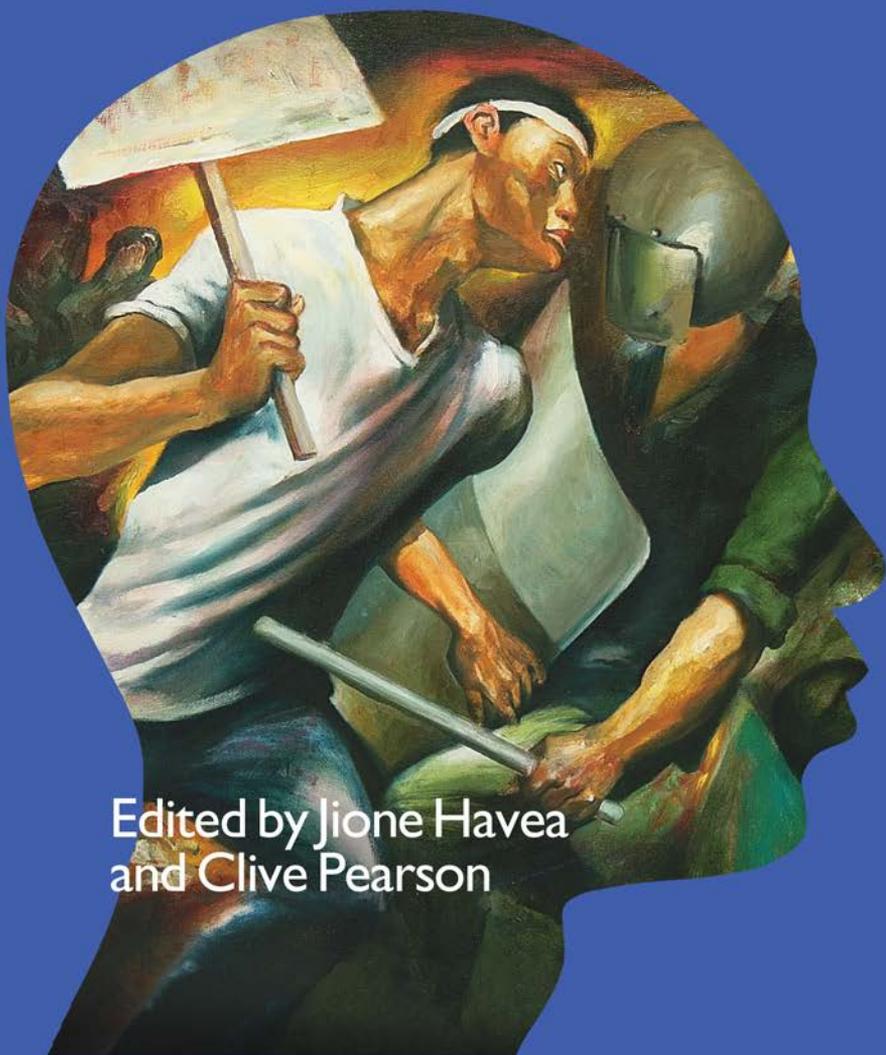


ROUTLEDGE

CROSS
CULTURAL
THEOLOGIES

Out of Place

Doing Theology
on the Crosscultural Brink



Edited by Jione Havea
and Clive Pearson

OUT OF PLACE

Cross Cultural Theologies

Series Editors: Jione Havea and Clive Pearson, both at United Theological College, Sydney, and Charles Sturt University, Australia, and Anthony G. Reddie, Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, Birmingham

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DOING THEOLOGY ON THE
CROSSCULTURAL BRINK

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Contents

Contributors	vii
Foreword	ix
1. Welcome <i>Jione Havea</i>	1
2. A Woman Out of Place: Argula von Stauff <i>Peter Matheson</i>	11
3. Alternative Images of God in the Global Economy <i>Joerg Rieger</i>	26
4. Displacing Identities: Hybrid Distinctiveness in Theology and Literature <i>Vitor Westhelle</i>	42
5. Out of Place with Jesus-Christ <i>Clive Pearson</i>	65
6. Holy Amphiboly: Prolegomena of Asian-American Theology <i>Fumitaka Matsuoka</i>	82
7. Out of Places: <i>Asian Feminist Theology of Dislocation</i> <i>Namsoon Kang</i>	105
8. Re-covering, Re-membling and Re-conciling the History of "Comfort Women" <i>Hisako Kinukawa</i>	129
9. Integration and Disintegration of Tamils in London Diaspora <i>Albert W. Jebanesan</i>	145

10. Newsprint Theology: Bible in the Context of HIV and AIDS <i>Gerald O. West</i>	161
11. Isaiah 53 and the Suffering-less Servant in Australian Pentecostalism <i>Jacqueline Grey</i>	187
12. How can we Sing the Lord's Song in Africa? <i>Anastasia Boniface-Malle</i>	202
13. Retelling Tamar's Story (2 Sam. 13:1-22) in Postcolonial Terms <i>Joseph Mathew</i>	223
14. What is in a Name? Abishag the Shunammite as <i>sokenet</i> in 1 Kings 1:1-4 <i>Mercedes L. García Bachmann</i>	233
15. Return, Medium of En-dor <i>Jione Havea</i>	255
Notes	267
Index of Names	277
Index of Subjects	281
Index of Biblical Characters	283

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Foreword

Anthony Reddie

I am the eldest child of Caribbean migrants. My parents were born in the Caribbean island of Jamaica and came to Britain in 1957 as part of the post-Second World War mass migration of Black people from the British Commonwealth, in what is often called the “Windrush Generation.”¹ One of the most formative, indeed, transformative experiences in my life occurred in the summer of my seventeenth year. That year, my parents paid for me and the older of my two younger brothers to travel to Jamaica, for the first time, to see our grandmother.

Neither of us had ever left the shores of Britain before and, while we had heard a great deal about Jamaica from our parents, nothing in our previous experience had prepared us for the cultural shock we would face when we arrived on the island. It was at this point that I was reminded of my sense of “in-between-ness.” I use this inelegant phrase to describe the profound sense of unease and displacement I felt struggling to reconcile the romantic images of “homecoming” and “belonging” I expected to feel, alongside the acute feelings of embarrassment and culture at being the “little Black English boy lost at sea” in rural Jamaica.

Like many from the second generation of post-War Black, Caribbean people living in Britain, I was already an instinctive “postcolonialist.” I did not identify with the incipient Whiteness that signified the sense of being “English” for the majority community, and I did not support England in any sporting endeavour. (Incidentally, I still continue to support any foreign nation against the English, especially in the classic colonial game of cricket.)² I had always felt alienated from the country of my birth and had travelled to Jamaica expecting to feel “at home” and a sense of place in terms of a need to belong. It was only after prolonged reflections on this formative experience that I realized that I was a hybrid

person. I was located somewhere across the Atlantic, between the Caribbean of my immediate forbears and the British postcolonial landscape of my birth and upbringing. I was “out of place.”

In more recent times, scholars such as R. S. Sugirtharajah and Edward Said, to whom mention has been made in this text, have explored in exemplary, eloquent fashion the notion of hybridity that lies at the heart of the postcolonial subject. It has become much more de rigueur to speak of postcolonial subjects who embrace their “in-between-ness” and the sense that one’s subjectivity often transcends the binary of “either/or” but, rather, is characterized by a “both/and” mode of engagement.

As the twenty-first century witnesses the greater flow of human traffic and the accompanying cultures and perspectives on the divine inherent within that movement, we are witnessing the ever-burgeoning phenomenon of the sense of being “out of place.” Perhaps it is now becoming more normative to talk of “out of place” as being the new “belonging”?

It is at this creative moment in human history – perhaps a Kiros moment – that we witness the unveiling of this landmark text. I commend my colleagues, Jione Havea and Clive Pearson, co-editors of this book series, for the creative leadership they have provided for this seminal piece of work. *Out of Place* provides a kaleidoscopic range of perspectives, narratives, subjectivities and thematic and methodological bursts of colour to ignite the imagination of all but the dullest of readers. This text provides insight into the myriad notions of what it means to be human in a world of marked change and where the sense of “solid ground” and being rooted in a specific and solidified space is becoming increasingly a rarity if not a misnomer.

Reading this text from my esteemed colleagues reminded me yet again of my own sense of being out of place in my daily interactions as a theologian and a person of faith. *Out of Place* speaks to me in a way that so many theological texts have failed to do in more recent times. It reminds me that we are all living through a time of relentless change where the indices for sameness and normativity are increasingly receding.

Indeed, this book emerges at a time when the leader of so-called free world is the archetypal hybrid subject. Barack Obama may well become the essentialized out of place spokesperson for

the intercultural, hybridized, inter-subjective human being of the twenty-first century. As such, I would commend him to read *Out of Place*. In fact, you don't need to be the President of the United States of America to find this book of interest. I comment *Out of Place* to everyone. It is an essential text for the postmodern twenty-first century!

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1 Welcome

Jione Havea

Be Strangers, No Longer

Welcome to another book on subjects that are *out of place*.

Like other places and homes, this book is a site with several sectors or rooms (read: chapters) that have been constructed according to the imaginations, personalities, orientations and commitments of different designers (read: authors). The bookish confines of this construction, with words, memories, stories, struggles, desires and objections, create the expectation that visitors (read: readers) will enter at the front then roam into the other sectors, one at a time, according to the order in which they are lined up. Hence, this chapter: it aims to welcome you, as readers, to this site. I welcome you not to be detached voyeurs but interested visitors who enter in order to be engaged, visited, touched, inspired, troubled, humoured, irritated, and haunted, by voices and bodies, subjects, from *out of place*.

The ensuing chapters are the creations of persons from different locations – from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas – addressing various *subjects* that are out of place. The subjects are individuals or groups of persons, but also memories and identities, textual characters and social struggles, ways of thinking and theologizing, and so forth. The subjects vary and differ, and are complex, but they share a common lot: they are *out of place* where they are. Their place is *out of place*, some because of fate; some because of choice, exclusion, discrimination, oppression, and so forth. Some of these subjects might not be strangers to you, so I in advance beg your pardon and patience.

In giving attention to subjects that are out of place, this book echoes another book by the same title, Edward W. Said's *Out of Place*. The chapters of this book are political and theological "memoirs" in the sense that they are biographical, both of and

through the authors, who write in order that out-of-place subjects are not forgotten. I thus welcome you to consider this book as if it is a companion to Said's, which he wrote in anticipation of his passing on (he passed away in 2003), peace be upon him, without seeking to put one or the other out of place.

The authors of the following chapters seek to bring *out-of-place subjects* into place by embracing their presences, amplifying their voices and enabling their subjectivities to influence how one reflects, relates and performs, theologically or otherwise. In this regard, I welcome you to also explore this book as one that shares the same drives with two other books: Fumitaka Matsuoka's *Out of Silence* and *Still at the Margins* which R. S. Sugirtharajah edited. This book also hears subjects out of silence, with the awareness that margins still exist and marginalization still continues.

This book is therefore not a lone and strange voice in the wilderness, out of place, but a site where other works intersect. Together, these works seek to bring into place subjects that are out of place, with the awareness that this involves dislocating and making those subjects vulnerable, at least in your readerly eyes. Together, also, these works redress the ways in which theology, as a discipline, and theological reflection, as a practice, have been *out of place* in several locations, nations, communities, churches, disciplines, institutions, and so forth. For theology and theological reflection to transform and be transformed, they need to come out of place and embrace what has thus far been out of place.

In the next section, I welcome you to a straightforward reading of this book. This involves introducing each of the chapters to you and to each other, for it is at this site that the chapters have come into, under, the same cover. Then, in the following section, I welcome you to *out-of-place* kinds of reading, which one might call, in other words, queer eyes for straightforward readers.

Reading Chapters into Place

Four basic convictions lie behind this book:

1. our theologies are shaped by the place in or for which/from where we theologize (all theologies are rooted and rooting, and potentially uprooting);
2. and no theological statement can encompass the complexity of all places (locally and globally);
3. so we are challenged to allow our theologies to intersect and supplement each other;
4. and to engage subjects that have thus far not been (fully) acknowledged, expressed and entertained.

The following chapters emphasize the fourth conviction, that we need to account for subjects that are out of place. The book flows in the expected pattern, with a chapter that establishes why we need this kind of study, followed by chapters that are more theoretical in nature, then shifts to ones that are more organic. Of course, none of the chapters is purely theoretical or completely organic. There is integration in each chapter, hence the book is not divided into “parts” but the chapters are kept together within the same unit, as a whole, so that the *out of place*-ness of each can complement others into place.

Peter Matheson (“A Woman Out of Place: Argula von Stauff”) sets the stage with a discussion of gender issues in the life of one woman who was *out of place*, Argula von Stauff, and probes the relationship between hermeneutical and gender perspectives. Whatever else, the Reformation represents a seismic shift in the understanding of Scripture. Yet little attention has been paid to the ways in which this was paralleled by an upheaval in attitudes to marriage and celibacy. How did a new look at the Bible during the Reformation affect traditional attitudes to gender? How did the understanding of what it meant to be *coram Deo*, before God, affect one’s “in placeness” in human society?

Joerg Rieger (“Alternative Images of God in the Global Economy”) attends to a subject that is out of place in many theological circles outside of Latin America, namely, economics. Rieger begins with the assumption that the world of economics is based on its own kind

of theology – a theology that is mostly hidden, *out of place*. How might we theologize in a world in which the “trickle-down” theory, according to which wealth accumulated at the top trickles down to the impoverished classes, does not work? The growing wealth produced by the global economy has not trickled down; rather, the economic production of the lower classes has aggregated into a flood of wealth upward. In this context, Rieger suggests that theology needs to take into account the complexity of solidarity among humans. This is one possible way of being *coram Deo*.

Vítor Westhelle (“Displacing Identities: Hybrid Distinctiveness in Theology and Literature”) digs into the attentions to hybrid identity and argues that transgression of purity is at the root of Christian “identity” ever dissimulated in the search for genealogies and pristine origins but never successfully evaded in the history of Christianity. Hybridity is at the very core of a distinctive Christian doctrine of incarnation. Attempts have been made in recent theologies to conceptualize incarnation as Christian hybridity, as did the early Fathers in their own contexts. Westhelle reviews some of these, then addresses contemporary issues in hybridity, and concludes by taking up recent Latin American literature as an example of hybrid dislocation that expresses this template of impurity. Hybridity, Christian identity, incarnation and impurity are *out of place*, actually, and this is not problematic.

Clive Pearson (“Out of Place with Jesus-Christ”) revisits Jung Young Lee’s hyphenated Jesus-Christ theology, which is based on a theory of marginality and in his experience of dislocation as an Asian-American, which is *out of place* in well-disciplined systematic theologies. Lee’s doctrine of incarnation, which posits Jesus-Christ as an emigrant, a hybrid if one appeals to Westhelle’s chapter, is a trustworthy ally for diasporic theologies and for persons who are out of place in Australia and beyond. Pearson’s attention to hyphenated identities has to do with the doctrine of incarnation in relation to the person of Jesus-Christ and also in relation to the Christologies that hyphenated migrant theologians (in Australia) develop.

Fumitaka Matsuoka (“Holy Amphiboly: Prolegomena of Asian-American Theology”) addresses the common stories of Americans of Asian descent, both hybridized and hyphenated, who live in a racialized society, which testify to the renewing power of the Spirit in

a community that is being continually reformed and reforming. The convergence of three decisive forces drives Asian American theological practices: their emerging subjectivity and self-representation as Asian Americans in a racialized society, their diasporic spirit of dissonance and dissent, and their particular faith orientation, the irresoluteness of faith, or the “Holy Amphiboly.” The permutation of these powerful forces in the lives of Asian Americans frames and drives their theological articulations of Christian faith.

Namsoon Kang (“Out of Places: *Asian Feminist Theology of Dislocation*”) examines the lot of an Asian feminist theologian: one has to think as if one is without home. Taking *dislocation* as a metaphor becomes an element in staging “the feminist” in extreme patriarchal cultures, and being a Christian theologian in multi-religious societies, where Christianity is still regarded as a *foreign* religion and feminism is disregarded due to its “foreign” origin. Thus, an Asian feminist theologian is constantly *out of places*. The three components of Asian, feminist, and Christian theologian lead Asian feminist theologians to a peculiar space of uprootedness and dislocatedness, requiring one to reside simultaneously in more than two worlds, constantly in exile even in one’s home country. Kang’s hope is for “homecoming” in a space of resistance, solidarity and compassion.

Hisako Kinukawa (“Re-covering, Re-memembering and Re-conciling the History of ‘Comfort Women’”) focuses on the “comfort women” who were forced into prostitution during the Second World War by the Japanese government. As a Japanese woman, from the belly of the Empire as it were, in solidarity with the abused women of Asia, Kinukawa writes in support of an alternative history in which the future generations of Japan, and beyond, will both re-memember and re-concile the violence committed against “comfort women” in the name of the empire. Kinukawa calls for both solidarity and responsibility on behalf of the *out-of-place* comfort women.

Albert W. Jebanesan (“Integration and Disintegration of Tamils in London Diaspora”) draws attention to a group of people *out of place* at another Empire: the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in London. They are children of the war, who carried the war within themselves into their new homes. After overcoming the shock of disintegration of their families and villages, they find themselves in London in a state of “culture shock.” There is a conflict between their expectations of

the new reality, and the expectations of the new social reality around them. Prolonged without a satisfactory solution, this has led to their anomic state. In London, the centre of their lives has shifted or totally removed. They have tried to create that centre but it is impossible to do so individually, hence the longing and quest for community.

Gerald O. West (“Newsprint Theology: Bible in the Context of HIV and AIDS”) re-examines a particular Bible reading methodology, known as Contextual Bible Study, a form of studying the Bible that is done in community and is community forming. In this chapter, West is concerned with persons in the *out-of-place* context of HIV and AIDS. HIV and AIDS are substantially impacting on the South African context in every way, including how to read the Bible and do theology. West examines in particular the demand for dignity, the embodied nature of dignity’s demand for presence, and the role of the socially engaged biblical scholar in bringing dignity’s demand for presence into articulation. Contextual Bible Study is helpful in dignifying persons infected with HIV and AIDS even in their *out of place*.

Jacqueline Grey (“Isaiah 53 and the Suffering-less Servant in Australian Pentecostalism”) explains how prosperity changes the way Isaiah 53 is read in Pentecostal circles. Pentecostalism appeared on the Australian scene in the early nineteenth century and was met with resistance from society and the established denominations. It was a movement led mainly by women and its academically uneducated membership was *out of place* in conservative Australian societies, both religious and general. In the early days, Isaiah 53 was understood as pointing towards the suffering of Jesus, but as the movement prospered and turned evangelical, Isaiah 53 became the pattern for responding to suffering, grief and loss.

Anastasia Boniface-Malle (“How can we Sing the Lord’s Song in Africa?”) writes in places where suffering is displacing and very painful. Boniface-Malle starts with Psalm 137, in which Israel lamented the senselessness of having to sing the Lord’s song in exile, and borrows the question for her African contexts: How can we sing the Lord’s song *at home*, where we are *out of place*? How can Africans sing the Lord’s song in Christian circles that discourage lamentation, even though the Church is encircled by death and dissymmetry? The way

forward, Boniface-Malle suggests, is to revive the spirits of lamentation, in Africa and all over.

Joseph Mathew (“Retelling Tamar’s Story [2 Sam. 13:1-22] in Postcolonial Terms”), somewhat shadowing Kinukawa’s agenda, appeals to the complex project of historical and psychological “recovery” in postcolonial theory. For Mathew, with regard to Tamar’s story, what is needed is resistance to both the violence committed and the tendency to ignore Tamar’s story. Shadowing Namsoon Kang, Mathew reads *dislocation* in the story of Tamar. In these regards, Mathew invites Tamar to hold together subjects who are *out of place* in many locations.

Mercedes L. García Bachmann (“What is in a Name? Abishag the Shunnamite as *sokenet* in 1 Kings 1:1-4”) explores the ways in which names and titles hide the importance of women in biblical stories. Women characters are not always presented as full characters, but agents in supporting roles. Such is the case with Abishag, the young woman brought in to warm up the cold and dying David. García Bachmann argues that Abishag is not completely *out of place*, for as *sokenet* (usually understood to be an “attendant” or “personal assistant”) to David (or was it to Bathsheba?) she served a crucial role in the story of David and Solomon. The narrator needs Abishag only as a bedfellow, but García Bachmann shows that as *sokenet* she was most significant.

My bookend piece (“Return, Medium of En-dor”) is a farewell chapter in which I revisit the story of another woman, a Medium, who was *out of place* because of the decree of an *out-of-place* man, Saul, a king, who came for her assistance (1 Sam. 28). If you persevere to my chapter, I shall leave you with an invitation to honour the complexity and richness of subjects who are *out of place*.

Now that you have an idea of how this site is set up, I welcome you to read the chapters in a different order. Each of the chapters, as a sector or room, to follow the metaphor, is a point of entry and exit. I welcome you to move freely, back and forth and around, and from side to side.

Reading *Out of Place*, Back, Outside, to the Cover

How might you read this book, this construction, if you take the painting on the cover seriously? If the painting has not already caught your interest, please turn back and read it into your imagination.

The painting on the cover invites you to expect a scuffle, represented through the face-off between a protestor and a riot policeman. The protestor comes bearing only a placard on which the words (demanding workers' rights) are blurred, and he appears to be gaining position over a riot policeman who comes with a shield and a baton, and the support of colleagues around him. The protestor comes with words and determination, almost prophetic, almost Davidic (see 1 Sam. 17:45-47); the riot policeman comes with full gear, but his baton is not as massive as the shaft of Goliath's spear (see 1 Sam. 17:4-7). The painting represents a point of tension between a protestor and a protector and representative of the authorities, and invites you to take sides. Even before you open this book, to enter this site, the cover queries: For whom are you entering? The protestor? The riot police? Whose side are you on, already?

The chapters of this book will put you on the spot, as if pushing you to take sides, but be warned, none would invite you to side with the authorities and the power keepers. This is because the chapters are about subjects that are *out of place*, rather than those that control spaces and protect authorities. If any of the chapters invite you to side with the authorities who keep and protect "the in," as the riot police does in the painting on the cover, then that would be out of place in this book. How ironic!

The painting on the cover manifests the kind of scene one would witness in places where activism is strong; and activism is and needs to be strong in places where authorities are corrupted and senseless. Whether it manifests in the streets of Bogotá or Manila, Canberra or Nairobi, and beyond, activism is necessary as long as subjects are *out of place*. How can one be impartial when confronted with such a struggle?

On the cover, actually, is a painting by the Filipino activist and theologian Emmanuel Garibay, *Jacob Wrestling with God*. It

foregrounds a protestor, to the left, who represents Jacob, raising a placard (which looks like a shovel that has been flattened out) with his right hand while his left hand reaches to the shield of a riot policeman, who represents “the man” that wrestled Jacob, and whom Jacob saw as G*d (Gen. 32:22-32). The riot policeman wears a helmet that shields his face from the viewer, as if to undermine Jacob’s explanation for why he named the place Peniel: “For I have seen G*d face to face, and yet my life is preserved” (32:30b). The painting raises critical questions: What face of G*d did Jacob see? What does the face of G*d look like? Who knows what G*d is like? Who owns G*d?

The constructors of this site are not too interested in what G*d looks like. They are more interested in subjects whom the gods press. Those *out of place* subjects include “comfort women” (chapters 8 and 14); slaves of the global economy (chapter 3); ones infected by HIV and AIDS (chapter 10); feminist women in Christian circles (chapter 7); exiled Tamils in London (chapter 9); persons in diaspora (chapters 5 and 6); Pentecostals (chapter 11); mourners (chapter 12); the raped (chapter 13) and used (chapter 14); and, in general, women (chapter 2) and Christians (chapter 4).

Each of the chapters is a point of entry, so you could start reading at different places, depending on where your interests lie:

- If *migration and relocation*, see at least chapters 5, 6 and 9;
- If *gender and women*, see at least chapters 2, 7, 8 and 12–15;
- If *identity*, see at least chapters 4, 6 and 7;
- If *economy and prosperity*, see at least chapters 3 and 11;
- If *Christian movements*, see at least chapters 11 and 12;
- If *Incarnation and Christology*, see at least chapters 4 and 5;
- If *empire*, see at least chapters 8, 9 and 13;
- If *biblical criticism*, see at least chapters 2 and 10–15;
- If *solidarity*, any of the chapters will work!

Of course, each of the chapters says more than I represent here, but they all share the courage to resist and rebel. Resistance comes out strongly on the cover, as well as in each of the chapters.

The figure of the protestor in the painting leans over the riot policeman, giving the impression that he is winning the struggle.

This is a fair reading of the Jacob story, for even when his hip was put out of joint (32:25-26) he had the upper hand and it was he who decided when to let his opponent go. It was G*d who asked to be released from Jacob, but not the other way around. Though disjointed (the marks between the legs of the protestor in Garibay's work is suggestive), Jacob held on and demanded a blessing. In this perspective, the giving of the new name and the blessing were G*d's way of surrendering to Jacob.

As Garibay sides with the disjointed Jacob of Genesis 32, so do the authors of the following chapters side with disjointed, out-of-place, subjects in their various settings. Such kinds of solidarity deserve places.

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2 A Woman Out of Place: Argula von Stauff

Peter Matheson

Exile, physical or spiritual, is part and parcel of the Christian experience. Prophetic statements or actions have regularly been regarded as being “out of place.” Behind such condemnations lurk unquestioned assumptions about what is “in place.” Whole peoples such as the Jews or the Gypsies, for instance, have been regarded as “out of place”; they were seen as threatening because they were rootless wanderers, homeless and untrustworthy. Much of the hostility that the Primitive Church’s apostles encountered may be attributed to such suspicions.

Today’s culture may, on the face of it, be more tolerant, less censorious of dissenting views and actions. A modern city such as Melbourne “makes place” for countless different cultures. The cross-cultural and highly mobile nature of such cities combines with a degree of moral and spiritual relativism to foster a culture of openness.

Frequently, however, tolerance appears to be only skin-deep. Profound anxieties about identity and “belonging” lie just under the surface. Mobility itself can encourage such anxiety. Newly arrived immigrants in Australasia can provide fertile ground for those spreading racist stereotypes about indigenous people precisely because they want to adapt themselves as fully as possible to the dominant culture. A perceived moral “mobility,” similarly, can be profoundly alarming to many religious people and may be part of the explanation why they perceive such a threat from particular groupings such as gay people.

The paradox that the eschatological community of the Church frequently attracts the most traditionally minded in our Western society may prompt us, therefore, to rethink radically what it means for a Christian to be “in place,” or “out of place.” Could it be that only those with a strong bonding with tradition are able to entertain

troublesome new ideas and initiatives? If so, the fault-line between “liberals” and “evangelicals” in the Church is a dangerous and misleading one. It obfuscates the commitment to catholicity. Neither “liberals” nor “evangelicals” may of themselves have the resources to resolve who and what is “in place.”

This chapter looks at gender issues from one specific historical perspective, probing the relationship between shifting hermeneutical perspectives and gender perspectives. Whatever else, the Reformation(s) represented a seismic shift in the understanding of Scripture. Yet little attention has been paid to ways in which this was paralleled by an upheaval in attitudes to marriage and celibacy. How did a new look at the Bible affect traditional attitudes to gender? How did the understanding of what it meant to be *coram Deo*, before God, affect one’s “in placeness” in human society? The question has countless ramifications, but here we will restrict ourselves to the relationship between women and men.

Margaret Forster’s *Good Wives*, recounting the travails of the wives of such notables as David Livingston, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Aneurin Bevan (the great Labour leader in post-war Britain) poses the question of a woman’s “place” very sharply, as does the recent study of the partners of some of New Zealand’s greatest literary and artistic figures edited by Deborah Shepard, *Between the Lives: Partners in Art* (Foster 2002; Shepard 2005). The wives or partners of prominent men may of course lead particularly fraught lives, with the unspoken demand that they sacrifice themselves for the greater Other. One’s place, however, is always dependent on that of one’s neighbour or partner.

Gender perceptions vary momentously with country and culture and time. Yet our very best imaginative writers such as Christa Wolf in her evocative and heart-breaking novel, *Medea*, set in ancient Corinth, remind us that there is a stubbornly persistent conviction that the unforgivable sin for a woman is to live by what she believes, to state openly what she thinks, and especially if she manifests this not only in words but in her whole “attitude,” the way in which she moves and dresses and even holds her head high (Wolf 2003).

Gender perceptions relate to the understanding of men as much as women. Very tardily, I fear, historians in my own specialist field of early modern Europe are beginning to realize that masculinity is as

much a variable as femininity. When is a man “out of place”? While Foucault and others have taught us that gender roles have strong correlations with the location of power, control and authority, we need to recognize that other factors – economic, social, cultural, political and not least religious – are coiled together here. So raising in any company, at any time, the question of what is in or out of place has always had the potential to create what Luther called *uffrur*, uproar, for it menaces our elemental need to belong, our own sense of identity.

Until quite recently most societies took for granted hierarchies of virtually absolute immutability in society. One knew whom to look up to, and who one could look down upon. There was great comfort in that. Shakespeare assumes structured “estates” in society as much as the most conservative churchman of his time. The father ruled the home, the magistrates or prince were the fathers of their people, and God as Father in heaven ruled the world. As late as nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe many good Christians took for granted the concept of “orders of creation,” which were God-given, or based on natural law. It was the threat to such orderliness that lurked behind much religiously sanctified anti-Semitism and racism. It could be rather illogically yoked at times with Social Darwinism. The “primitive” are an unnecessary brake on the upward march of progress. It is a sobering exercise to read the novels, text-books and newspapers of early twentieth-century Europe and realize the extent to which it was drenched in such prejudices.

Class, race, caste or generational roles, then, were as clearly demarcated as gender. Everyone knew their place. Much of the bewilderment in today’s conservative and reactionary church circles rests on a yearning for such lost certainty and security. This may also explain the stubborn refusal to distinguish between culturally conditioned gender roles and sexuality itself. The very idea that sexuality varies with time and place is deeply upsetting. The prevalence of the metaphor of “plumbing” in the discussion of gender issues today, even among those who should know better, is only the most overt indication of this intellectual and emotional blockage.

As important, moreover, as any analysis of who was “in place” or “out of place,” is the question of how people learned to “move on,” of what strategies have been historically successful in raising

consciousness, loosening up hardened mind-sets, gaining leverage with the opinion-makers, exerting pressure on the gate-keepers? Those who feel contentedly “at home” will never, of course, be able to empathize with the exile. As Heidegger’s ruminations suggest, there may be no more dangerous concept than that of home, of *Heimat*. Yet is it not true that only those who are ultimately confident about their own belonging can open up “their place” to others?

Angst about our place in the great scheme of things may undergird one distinguishing characteristic of our generation: the deep pessimism about bringing about any fundamental political or structural changes, for example, in the relations of rich to poor. The papacy of Pope John Paul reminded us how deep the chasm can be between “liberals” who care about issues of individual freedoms and prophetic voices about war and social justice. Few seem to get it right across the board.

We may, then, profit from a dialogue with past attempts to subvert hierarchy and privilege. Almost invariably this has been done by those whose own words and actions have been regarded as “out of place.” In their own defence, they have often gone onto the offensive, and turned the argument around, by pointing to a transcendent order of things which points in a quite different direction.

As a case study, I would like to introduce you to a Bavarian woman with a name improbable even to Germans, one who lived on the cusp of the early modern period. She was the daughter of two conservative aristocratic parents, and became a mother of four. Her husband was a featureless nonentity. She was probably the first European woman to be published in her own lifetime. Her supporters hailed her as a prophet in the line of Deborah and Huldah, and as a reincarnation of the St Catherine who dished a hundred eminent scholars in Alexandria and whose martyr’s death is still celebrated today by Catherine wheel fireworks. Her opponents slammed her as a whore, a bitch, and much else, and plotted her speedy demise.

Her name is Argula von Grumbach. She operated (or flourished, as we used to say) in the early years of the Reformation, the 1520s (Matheson 1995). She would never have got a hearing if it had not been a time of turmoil, one in which vast, or even cosmic, change was on everyone’s lips. She would never have found the resonance

she did without the very recent invention of printing which side-stepped the monopolization of the public forum by princes, clerics and academics. Only in a “musical chairs world” has an individual like her the opportunity to change their own particular chair, to find a new “place.”

Argula von Grumbach (1492–1556/7) was prodigiously “out of place,” but she lived in a church and a society whose pillars were manifestly collapsing, whose values and institutions were turning topsy-turvy day by day. That takes nothing away from her courage, imagination and intelligence. The context of such apocalyptic expectations and unprecedented social upheaval needs, however, to be kept firmly in mind.

Women of her time were by no means without influence. Think of Elizabeth of England, or Teresa of Avila, and a hundred thousand less prominent women who were patrons of art, sponsors of avant-garde groups, heroic martyrs, and efficient business-women. Men may have shone like the sun, one of the leading authorities on the early modern era has noted, but women shone like the moon (Wunder 1998). No household could exist without their quiet control of everything from children’s education to the family finances. They had their own spinning groups; they went to the market or to the baths together. They had their own places and spaces in which they talked their own talk and framed their own counsel. They were agents, and should not be perceived as victims.

Yet there were some emphatic “No, Noes” for the female sex. Women could not attend university, could not preach or become clergy, were unable to be citizens or to offer themselves for public office in the cities. Indeed many even of their traditional rights as owners of a craft or business were being progressively curtailed. Their nunneries were soon to be shut down in Protestant lands, and strictly enclosed in Catholic ones. If women misbehaved it was often the husband who was punished because legally women just didn’t figure (Wiesner-Hanks 2000; see Wiesner-Hanks 1993 and McKee 1998 concerning the role of women).

Behind these legal restrictions lurked a whole universe of assumptions which are profoundly alien to us today, but which we need to grasp if Argula von Grumbach’s initiatives are to be understood. Classical and allegedly biblical authorities were cited as proof that

women were inferior. They were, compared to men, of an inherently “damp” disposition (doctors pronounced their breasts cold and damp), were inclined to hysterical and emotional outbursts and generally were incapable of the cool, analytical reflection at which men excelled.

As the sinful daughters of Eve their God-given “place” in society was a submissive one. As daughters they were to be obedient to their fathers, as siblings to their brothers, as wives to their husbands, as widows to their guardians, and in property matters often to their sons as well. They had a public role at the side of their husbands on secular and religious occasions, one far from purely ornamental, but they had no voice in public. Exceptional women, as in the early Church, could sometimes attain to the status of “honorary men.”

As children needed the rod for their own good, so did women. The current phrase “a rule of thumb,” reminds us that it was permissible to beat them provided the stick was not thicker than one’s thumb. On the whole, though, there was no need for such beating. Women knew better than to endanger their honoured and secure standing at home, church and in communal life by foolhardy words or actions. Here then is a tightly spun net of medical, philosophical, cultural and theological conceptions within which women were caught. Contemporary art and poetry, however, suggests that the relationship between the sexes was an area of constant tension.

Argula von Grumbach gained fame and notoriety by challenging many of these assumptions about what a woman can or cannot do. Her importance for us today lies not only in the pioneering nature of her initiatives, the persuasive biblical justifications she gave for them, and the remarkable resonance her writings found in the reading public, but because she signals the possibility of quietly subverting a universe of repression from within.

She did not argue from a “rights” perspective. Rather she burrowed into Scripture and engaged honestly and prayerfully with her own inner conflicts and those of her friends. She cared more about maintaining humility than about her own personal “space.” As we seek to come to terms with the clinches and clichés about Scripture and authority and sexuality in our contemporary church there may be much to learn from this curiously indirect, highly personal approach.

A word about her life. She grew up as the privileged daughter of Bernhardin von Stauff and Katherina von Thering, and to the end of her life signed herself, "Frein," or baroness. The family was a proud one, involved in fierce, abortive skirmishes with the centralizing Bavarian state. Both parents died of the plague when she was still young, so she had to learn to cope on her own in the distant Munich court. She imbibed the family's love of chivalry, the ancient dreams of the pursuit of the Holy Grail – she and her siblings were all named after characters in the knightly romance, Parsifal – and she shared its passion for education. Her father presented her with a costly, beautiful printed German Bible on her tenth birthday.

The Munich court, where she spent some ten years as a young woman, was a lively one; it was open to Italian and French influences, to the charms and acids of humanism, and to the rich mystical piety of Johann Staupitz, so influential on Martin Luther. One role model for her was the formidable Duchess Kunigunde, her mistress, who had no truck with superstition and on one notable occasion exposed a charlatan in Augsburg who had claimed that the consecrated host was her only sustenance. A peephole in the wall revealed all!

In 1516 her influential uncle and guardian, Jerome von Stauff, was arraigned for treason, tortured and executed. Kinship mattered intensely at this time. Argula will have felt that everything that happened to von Stauff also happened to her. She left the court shortly afterwards to marry Frederick von Grumbach, a nobleman from Franconia. The Franks lived just to the north, but were very different in mores and dialect from the Bavarians. He was administrator of the little town of Dietfurt for the Bavarian dukes. Argula set up her little household there. This happened one year before Luther burst on the scene with his 95 Theses. Soon her first children were being born.

When we wake up one morning and find the world around us has suffered a sea change we speak of cognitive dissonance. We have the same eyes, senses, routines, values, treasury of experience as before but none of them make sense of the new landscape. Argula had already experienced such dissonance with the simultaneous death of both parents from the plague and then the final humiliation of her uncle. Jerome von Stauff's public execution informed all and sundry that the days of the independent Bavarian nobility were over for ever. It will have been no coincidence that Argula and her