

VOICES OF MARGINALITY: EXILE AND RETURN IN SECOND ISAIAH 40-
55 AND THE MEXICAN IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

by

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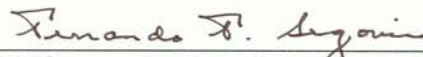
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Introduction

Among the more prevalent themes in the Hebrew Bible is the theme of a people journeying in and out of a land. From beginning to end, the Hebrew Bible may be considered as a series of narratives, tales, and depictions of deportation and displacement. Robert P. Carroll even argues that the journey narratives present in the Hebrew Bible may be taken as biblical paradigm narratives of social movement and also as a template for what follows in the edited construction of the various meta-narratives and canons of the Bible. In his own words:

the grand narratives, even the metanarrative itself, of the Bible are about deportations, little and large, real and symbolic, and the constant hope of return, of restoration, of homecoming. . . . the whole Bible itself may well be regarded as the production of such diasporic experiences.¹

More precisely, the Bible is the great metanarrative of diaspora.²

The term diaspora is based on two Greek terms **σπείρω** (to sow) and the preposition **δια** (over), which combined (**διασπείρω**) mean ‘scattering’ or

¹ Robert P. Carroll, “Deportation and Diasporic Discourses in the Prophetic Literature,” in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions*, ed. James M. Scott (New York: Brill, 1997), 103.

² The biblical journey narratives include the sojourning of Abraham (Gen 12-23), the wilderness wanderings of Israel (Ex 15-18) the exile of Israel (Ps 137, Lamentations 1), and the return of Israel (Is 40-55), see Carroll, “Deportation and Diasporic Discourses in the Prophetic Literature,” 64.

‘dispersion’. When applied to humans, the ancient Greek thought of diaspora is migration and colonization.³ In biblical Hebrew, the term is גלות (exiles), derived from גלה, which originally means “to strip” or “to remove” (cf. Ez 12:3-7).⁴ The term גלות initially referred to the settling of scattered colonies of Jews outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile and has assumed a more general meaning of people settled away from their historical homelands.⁵ Arguably, the biblical narrative of the Babylonian exile represents the beginnings of the permanent diaspora of the Jews. Since the collapse of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, diaspora has come to represent the normal and normative experience of the majority of Jews who have ever lived.⁶ In many ways the journey narratives present in the Hebrew Bible have played a significant role in the formation of diaspora as a normative experience for Jews.

Among the various portrayals of the Jewish diasporic experience in the Hebrew Bible, none has been more intriguing to the field of Biblical Studies than the diasporic experiences portrayed in Second Isaiah (40-55). These highly stylized

³ Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), ix.

⁴ Shemaryahu Talmon, “‘Exile’ and ‘Restoration’ in the Conceptual World of Ancient Judaism,” in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions*, ed. James M. Scott (New York: Brill, 2001), 107

⁵ Judith T. Shuval, “Diaspora Migration: Definitional Ambiguities and a Theoretical Paradigm,” *International Migration* 38 (2000): 41.

⁶ Carroll, “Exile, Restoration, and Colony: Judah in the Persian Empire,” 83.

texts have not only been the focus of a plethora of scholarly books and articles, they have also informed the religious faith of many contemporary readers. In addressing matters of faith, the diasporic experiences of exile and return in Second Isaiah can serve as categories for various forms of contemporary social movement such as international migration and cross-border movement. Using the biblical themes of exile and return to speak about immigration is an approach that underscores the work of many Latin-American scholars. In her article, “*Migración y desarraigo en la Biblia*,” Elsa Tamez, who states, “*La migración es un hecho común y constante en todo lo que los cristianos llamamos historia de la salvación escrita en la Biblia* [Immigration is a common and constant reality in all what Christians call salvation history in the Bible].” With regard to a U.S. context, the categories of exile and return that emerge from the poetry of Second Isaiah can serve as a platform for speaking about the diasporic experience of the Mexican immigrant. The Mexican population living in the United States has diasporic character because its migration were forced by economic conditions, war, and political uncertainty, and includes many undocumented Mexican immigrants⁷ More importantly, however, is that from this dialogue, there is certain to surface the marginalized voice of the Mexican immigrant. This voice, according to Fernando Segovia, represents what he calls the “other.” For Segovia, the feeling of

⁷ Martha Idalia Chew-Sanchez, “Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora in the United States: The Role of the *Corridos* about Immigration and the Shared Aesthetics in Their Performance by *Conjuntos Norteños*” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of New Mexico, 2001), 2.

“otherness” describes the experience of many first-generation immigrants. Becoming the “other” means living as permanent aliens or strangers, both where they came from and where they find themselves. As the “other,” they find themselves to be “silenced and speechless” in their new context. Such is the point of departure for this dissertation: “Voices of Marginality: Exile and Return in Second Isaiah (40-55) and the Mexican Immigrant Experience”.

Chapter one demonstrates how the diasporic categories of exile and return in the Bible can inform a comparative analysis of the Babylonian exile and the Mexican immigrant experience. Assisting in this task is the theoretical framework of diaspora theology, which serves as a model for evaluating and critiquing the social, economic, and religious aspects that comprise the diasporic experience.

The second chapter includes a discussion of issues that relate to exile and the reality of empire in both the biblical context and the Mexican immigrant experience. It examines how empire plays a significant role in shaping the biblical text’s portrayal of exile and return. This chapter examines the socio-historical context for the Mexican-U.S. migration. Following this analysis, the chapter proceeds to a selection of sociopolitical and socioeconomic experts who acknowledge a causal connection between the Mexican immigration experience and the U.S. global economic empire.

Chapter three provides a critical reading of Second Isaiah (40-55) from the historical-cultural horizon of the community of that day and through the lenses of the chosen patterns of rhetoric in which the prophet has embodied and encoded his

message of exile. This chapter argues that the primary concern for Second Isaiah was providing the Judean community with a divine response to the Babylonian exile. The reading process, then, moves to the broader context of the Mexican immigrant experience in which I examine points of intersection between a selection of *corridos* and Second Isaiah.

Chapter four examines Second Isaiah's dominant theme involving the imminent return of the Judean exilic community to Zion/Jerusalem. It is in the particularity of the text that one discovers the various nuances to Second Isaiah's return-oriented imagery; however, it is through diaspora theology that the Mexican immigrant *corridos* become equally important in our understanding of return.

The final chapter provides some concluding remarks on the why of this project. This chapter looks at the contributions and challenges this project presents to current day Biblical Studies. It critically engages the hegemonic practice within dominant Biblical Studies to ignore the history of the "other".

Chapter One

Diaspora Theology as an Optic for Analyzing Exile and Return

The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles across borders, break barriers of thought and experience.

Edward Said⁸

In the Biblical thought world, the larger category of diaspora appears to incorporate two basic subcategories, exile and return, both of which involve deeply felt pain (cf. Ps 137) and unspeakable joy (cf. Is 48:20). Diaspora is a span of time that arches between exile and return.⁹ In the Bible, exile is to be understood not only as a physical uprooting from the homeland, but also as more generalized remoteness from God.¹⁰ This remoteness eventuates in the anguish of exile and afflicts the entire people of Israel. The incurred suffering can only be healed by restoration of the land (שיבה) and a concomitant return to God (תשובה).¹¹ It was under the conditions of forced exile that the people of Israel's longings for home,

⁸ Edward Said, 'Reflection on Exile', in *Out There, Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 357-63.

⁹ Talmon, " 'Exile and 'Restoration'." 110-11.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

households and homecoming arose. Therefore, central to the biblical idea of diaspora is that the pain of exile never can be final, but may be ameliorated through return to the land. Even when it is long past, exile continues to affect the self-understanding of the people involved. Shemaryahu Talmon says, “It may be said that a distinguishing mark of the biblical universe of thought is the hope for an immanently and imminently expected return from diaspora to the land.”¹² Even so, the people’s adverse experience will continue to haunt its historical consciousness and shape its own selfhood throughout its generations no matter how long the people may exist.

However, exile and return do not define diaspora only in the Bible. These terms embody human experiences that are perhaps even more common now than in the ancient world. In a Survey of International Labour Migration conducted by the United Nations, Peter Stalker estimated that 80 million people now live in a receiving country, that is, one that receives migrant workers.¹³ James H. Mittelman likewise states:

Large-scale transfers of population are a long historical process common to all regions of the world, but in recent decades the global restructuring of production has accentuated differences between receiving and sending countries, drawing massive imports of labor primarily from Africa, Asia, and Latin America to the advanced capitalist areas.¹⁴

¹² Talmon, “ ‘Exile and ‘Restoration’ .” 118.

¹³ Peter Stalker, *The Work of Strangers: A Survey of International Labour Migration* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1994), 3.

¹⁴ James H. Mittelman, *The Globalization Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 59.

These large-scale population transfers incorporate diasporic elements that equate with the various exiles and returns in the Bible. The contemporary diasporic experiences do suggest themes and questions that can inform our understanding of the biblical diasporic experience, even as the reverse can occur.¹⁵ The exile and return experience of the people of Israel, more specifically the ancient people of Judah, provides scholars with a template with which they can engage in a systematic comparison and analysis of two very different diasporic experiences, different in terms of the historical era in which they emerged, their size, and the basis of the group.¹⁶ In other words, the biblical diasporic subcategories of exile and return create an entry point for organizing and analyzing two specific diasporic groups across space and time, in particular their social and economic conditions. These diasporic subcategories do not necessarily require modern scholars to use the ancient Jewish diaspora as a point of departure. As one who is situated academically in Biblical Studies, however, I find the biblical texts that reveal the Jewish experience of diaspora in 586 BCE become an unavoidable frame of reference, because of their pertinence to the development of the Hebrew Bible. Second, as one who is also a self-identified Mexican American from the Southwest,

¹⁵ Daniel L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer-Stone Books, 1989), 11.

¹⁶ This approach is an adaptation of Kim D. Butler's method and theory to the study of diasporas. Along with exile and return, she also identifies two other dimensions of diaspora: relationships with the hostlands and interrelationships within the diasporic group. "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse," *Diaspora* 10 (2001): 191.

the experiences of the U.S. Hispanic immigrant community and more specifically of the U.S. Mexican immigrant community become equally necessary in the proposed comparative analysis of diasporas.¹⁷

The defining characteristics of many U.S. Hispanic immigrants' experiences clearly embody the same subcategories of exile (גלות) and return (שיבה) of the biblical diaspora. They comprise an exile in the sense that they involve an initial dispersal. This initial dispersal is a lived experience in which one is physically uprooted and displaced.¹⁸ According to Fernando Segovia, this exilic status emerges as the underlying reality in the story of U.S. Hispanic immigration, and in this case immigration is partly the result of globalization.¹⁹ Furthermore, he shows

¹⁷ According to Butler, diasporas can also include other types of movements, including voluntary exile, cumulative individual movements, trade networks, and empire building: often multiple types of migration are combined with a single diaspora. "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse," 199.

¹⁸ Other aspects of the U.S. Hispanic immigration experience include the experience of refugees (i.e. Nicaragua, Guatemala, etc.) who fled war and violence. Though not directly evaluated in this project, they are still valued and demand future attention.

¹⁹ Fernando F. Segovia, "In the World but Not of It: Exile as Locus for a Theology of the Diaspora." in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, ed. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 202; In their book *Fronteras No Más: Toward Social Justice at the U.S.-Mexico Border* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), Kathleen Staudt and Coronado states the following, "Contemporary global capitalism draws on the long-standing economic principle of comparative advantage: countries have advantageous qualities, such as expertise, labor of particular cost, and/or natural resources, that together can be joined to maximize profits and reduce consumer costs (p 108)"; The result, according to Robert A. Isaak, is a rapid increase in inequality between the affluent and the poor, *The Globalization Gap: How the Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Left Further Behind* (New York: FT Prentice Hall,

that the concept of return is a reality that is inextricably associated with the diasporic experience, beginning at the moment of dispersal.²⁰ Indeed, Talmon reminds us that, “In every hour of deportation the seed for repatriation is sown.”²¹ Many U.S. Hispanic immigrants imagine and anticipate a return to their homeland until that dream becomes physically unlikely.²² Yet, the dream continues to shape the former immigrant’s self-identity. But whether a dream or a reality, the possibility of a return does shape and impact the various experiences of U.S. Hispanic immigrants.

For many U.S. Hispanic immigrants, the immigration story is a flesh-and-blood experience of social conflict as well as of cultural accommodation.²³ Their narrative, one finds, on the one hand express the tragedy and deleterious effects of

2004), 4; The affluent also engage in conspicuous consumption, which creates a heightened demand in the global city for low-wage laborers and service industry employees, Jess Wendover, “Globalization and Its Discontents Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money,” *Berkeley Planning Journal* 14 (2000): 117.

²⁰ Segovia writes “. . . because the death of my father, in the spring of 2001, had awakened in me a profound desire, a deeply felt need, to go back-to resume the beginning of my life, to see where we had lived and to walk where we had walked. Indeed, this was a return haunted by spirits.” “Forty Years Later: Reflections on Going Home,” *The Spire* 25 (2004): 11.

²¹ Talmon, “‘Exile’ and ‘Restoration,’ 118.

²² Anders H. Stefansson, “Homecoming to the Future: From Diasporic Mythographies to Social Projects of Return,” in *Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return*, ed. Fran Markowitz and Anders H. Stefansson (Lanham: MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 7. “Many refugees simply are not allowed to return, or to return with the intention of settling down, by current political regime in their homelands.”

²³ Fernando F. Segovia, “Melting and Dreaming in America: Visions and Revisions,” in *A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on America from the Margins*, ed. Eleazar S. Fernandez and Fernando F. Segovia (Orbis Books, 2001), 250.

immigration, such as the travails, poverty, exploitation, and opposition to immigration.²⁴ On the other hand, theirs is also a sanguine account of how U.S. Hispanic immigrants struggle and survive in the face of forbidding odds.²⁵ Moreover, this story contains theological aspects that are expressed not only in the oral or literary accounts, but also in the creative arts.²⁶ These theological ideas are not only a factor in forming diasporic social organization, but also in shaping and maintaining diasporic identities.²⁷ This is reiterated in the following by Carlos González Gutiérrez:

A stigmatized identity can turn assimilation into an injurious transition unless immigrants resort to shared repertoires based on national origin, immigrant status or religious conviction. Some identities protect immigrants; others weaken them by transforming them into disadvantaged ethnic minorities.²⁸

For many U.S. Hispanic immigrants, identity is forged by socioreligious and sociocultural elements that are deeply rooted in the legacy of five centuries of Spanish colonial presence and its postcolonial aftermath. The emerging ideology among the Mexican American diaspora community, therefore, is one that involves

²⁴ Segovia, "Melting and Dreaming in America," 255.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Durand, *Miracles on the Border*, 113-15.

²⁷ Waltraud Kokot, Khachig Tölöyan and Carolin Alfonso, "Introduction," in *Diaspora, Identity, and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research*, ed. Waltraud Kokot, Khachig Tölöyan and Carolin Alfonso (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1-4.

²⁸ "Fostering Identities: Mexico's Relations with Its Diaspora," *The Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 550-560.

symbols of colonialism and domination, and this ideology plays a significant role in the religious identity of many U.S. Hispanic immigrants.²⁹ It even includes a perverse theology which inextricably links blatant military conquest to the triumph of Catholicism over the “heathen” indigenous gods of the New World.³⁰ So, to understand the U.S. Hispanic immigration experience, one must consider the sociopolitical and socioreligious impact of empire on Hispanic identity, both that of the earlier Spanish and now the U.S. forms of expression. Yet doing so requires an alternative theoretical framework that can evaluate and critique the social, economic, and religious aspects that comprise the diasporic experience.

²⁹ Gutiérrez introduces his article with this data, “According to the United States Census Bureau, approximately 19 million people in the United States identify themselves as Mexican origin. Most of them are American citizens whose ancestors came from the neighboring country to the south. More than one-third (7.01 million in 1997) are first-generation immigrants who were born in Mexico. Persons of Mexican origin who live permanently in the United States can be considered members of a modern diaspora, in that they constitute “a minority ethnic group of migrant origin which maintains sentimental or material links with its land of origin.” “Fostering Identities,” 545.

³⁰ Luis Rivera Pagan, *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1992), 2-4; Osvaldo F. Pardo, *The Origins of Catholicism: Nahuatl Rituals and Christian Sacraments in Sixteenth Century Mexico* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 1; For the indigenous perspective on the Spanish conquest, see J. Jorge Klor de Alva, “Religious Rationalization and the Conversions of the Nahuas: Social Organization and Colonial Epistemology,” in *To Change Place: Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, ed. David Carrasco (Niwot, CO : University Press of Colorado 1991), 233-245; *Idem*, “Spiritual conflict and accommodation in New Spain: toward a typology of Aztec responses to Christianity,” in *Inca and Aztec states, 1400-1800: Anthropology and History*, ed. George Collier (New York : Academic Press, 1982), 345-366; Miguel, Leon Portilla ed., *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico* (Boston: Beacon Press 1992).

The Theoretical Framework of Diaspora Theology

For a comparative analysis of the contemporary U.S. Hispanic immigrant experience and the Jewish diaspora in the sixth century BCE, the categories of exile and return offer a useful template, although organizing both diasporic experiences under these two categories only serves as the preliminary phase in the process of comparative analysis. The purpose of this scholarly analysis is to critically evaluate the specific processes and patterns of exile and return. Assisting in this analytical task is the theoretical framework of diaspora theology.³¹ This social-critical theology is designed to facilitate a more detailed, social and political analysis of the processes of exile and return. It provides a framework through which to consider not only theological issues, but sociopolitical and sociocultural concerns as well. This diaspora theology considers the various forces that contribute to the creation and maintenance of exile and return, a bipolarity that, once experienced, cannot completely be collapsed into a single element. Its theoretical framework is inherently critical and profoundly ideological, because it represents the perspective of an exiled individual. It accepts “a multitude of constructs reflecting and

³¹ The attempt to use diaspora theology as theoretical framework for analyzing exile and return is influenced by Smith’s argument that a viable way to understand the Babylonian exile is a worldview informed by the Fourth World—in short, by the social events and values that become operative for a minority in conditions of forced removal and settlement under imperial control and power. He refers to this as a “Fourth World” theology. “It is the theology of those “migrants” and “refugees” who choose to live without power, yet as a people. . . For the Fourth World, Babylon is the most meaningful image for a contemporary theology.” *The Religion of the Landless*, 10.

engaging a variety of realities and experiences across history and culture.”³² Within the parameters of cultural studies in biblical criticism, diaspora theology embraces three contemporary movements and discourses: postmodernism, postcolonialism, and liberation theology. It is from this embrace that diaspora theology seeks to give voice and agency to groups that have been marginalized by dominant systems of power.

Diaspora Theology: Parameters

Understood within the parameters of cultural studies, diaspora theology is given a broad range of vision for making sense of the diasporic experience. From the field of cultural studies, diaspora is ascribed a broader signification that involves a core affirmation (territorial displacement or movement away from homeland into other region) and the brief additional qualification that such displacement may be voluntary or coerced.³³ This broader signification encompasses such categories of people as expatriates, expellees, political refugees, and undocumented and documented immigrants. Diaspora theology prefers this broader or “minimalist” approach to diaspora, with an emphasis on geographical dispersion from one’s own land and people to somebody else’s land and people.³⁴ In Segovia’s words:

³² Segovia, “In the World but Not of It,” 199.

³³ Fernando F. Segovia, “Postcolonial and Diasporic Criticism in Biblical Studies: Focus, Parameters, Relevance,” *Studies in World Christianity* 5 (1999): 187.

³⁴ Ibid.

Finally, it focuses on the common denominator of the diaspora experience: geographical translation. . . . the analysis of geographical translations of people in general, whether in the present or in the past, whether in the West or outside the West. . . . In other words, the common geographical denominator--the phenomenon of un-settlement, travel, re-settlement--allows for a wide number of various and hence of applications.³⁵

This broader understanding of the diaspora experience gives priority to the physical experience of displacement over against an idealistic type of diaspora.

Cultural studies also provides diaspora theology with a valuable theoretical terrain for rethinking the Bible as a form of cultural politics while at the same time providing both a discourse of intervention and possibility and a means by which to live with the bipolarity of the diasporic experience. Diaspora theology as an interpretive model draws on the political aspects inscribed in the cultural studies project.³⁶ Here, the aim is not merely to describe contemporary culture and social practices, but to change them, and more pointedly, to transform existing structures of power.³⁷ In other words, the cultural studies project carries with it a vision of a better, more just society. It is grounded on a moral and political critique of late

³⁵ Segovia, "Postcolonial and Diasporic Criticism in Biblical Studies," 187.

³⁶ For further discussion on the political aspects of cultural studies, see Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies," in *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treicher (New York: Routledge, 1992), 277-94.

³⁷ Jennifer Daryl Slack and Laurie Anne Whitt, "Ethics and Cultural Studies," in *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treicher (New York: Routledge, 1992), 572.

capitalism, and more generally of oppressive cultural and social formations.³⁸

Under this influence, diaspora theology is inscribed with an aim for social change, which is to be played out mainly in the area of biblical criticism. This change involves the following:

. . . to break down the traditional and fundamental Eurocentric moorings and boundaries of the discipline in favor of a multidimensional and decentered mode of discourse, a global discourse in which all readers have a voice and engage one another out of their own respective social locations, out of their one otherness.³⁹

It is within the area of biblical criticism that diaspora theology serves as a voice for those who live in “otherness”. Such “otherness”, according to Segovia, “implies a biculturalism with no home, no voice, and no face: as the ones who left, we are not accepted in our present home; similarly, within our present home, we find a script for us to play and a mask for us to wear.”⁴⁰ Therefore, as the voice of and for otherness within biblical criticism, diaspora theology seeks to liberate and empower all readers, by taking in to account the experience and culture of readers in the act of reading and interpretation.⁴¹ As the voice of otherness, diaspora theology

³⁸ Daryl Slack, “Ethics and Cultural Studies,” 572.

³⁹ Fernando F. Segovia, “Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora: A Hermeneutics of Otherness and Engagement,” in *Reading from this Place*, ed. Mary Ann Tolbert, vol.1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 58.

⁴⁰ Fernando F. Segovia, “Toward Intercultural Criticism: A Reading Strategy from the Diaspora,” in *Reading from this Place*, ed. Mary Ann Tolbert, vol.2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 322.

⁴¹ Segovia, “Toward A Hermeneutic of the Diaspora,” 68.

“becomes a voice of and for liberation: not afraid to expose, critique, and provide an alternative vision and narrative; grounded in mixture as something not to be eschewed and marginalized but valued and engaged; committed to the fundamental principles of freedom and justice.”⁴² It calls for justice for individuals and groups that are variously seen as subjugated, silenced, repressed, oppressed, and discriminated against. It resists the reduction of individuals and groups to the status of a mere tool or instrument for another’s end.

Diaspora Theology as an Exercise in Postmodernism

Among the various influential discourses in the development of diaspora theology is postmodernism. Diaspora theology embraces postmodernism’s primary argument that there is no single reality but rather there are a multitude of “realities”.⁴³ “Reality” is thus a function of perspective, something that is historically and culturally located and in constant flux. Of course all reality is a construction that has both a context and a particular perspective. However, this does not mean that reality is solipsistic, denying the concrete existence of data (temporal, physical, action, and spatial), but rather that this data is shaped in large measure by the imagination of the historiographer working within his/her own

⁴² Segovia, “Toward A Hermeneutic of the Diaspora,” 67.

⁴³ Segovia, “In the World but Not of It,” 198.

social locations and out of his/her own ideological framework. Of course the constructions that emerge from the imagination can also be deconstructed.⁴⁴

Consequently, in using diaspora theology to analyze the processes and patterns of exile and return, one must be open to the postmodern premise that there is no universal or objective perspective. Objectivity is in fact another practice of ideology that presents interest in covert form as an established fact.⁴⁵ Rather, the modern historian seeks the ideal plausibility, i.e. the making of arguments that logically account for the realities that have formed over space and time by the actions of people. One result of postmodernist influence is that diaspora theology may direct one's attention to those in the margin by assuming a critical stance toward the reign of Western objectivity and domination.⁴⁶ Because it is suspicious of all ideological frameworks, it offers users a critical perception or awareness of knowledge-power regimes, which, in turn, leads one to consider those in the margin. Late modern schemes to produce neutral knowledge are, however, pursued at the expense and exclusion of the situated knowledges of marginal and subaltern

⁴⁴ Segovia, "In the World but Not of It," 199.

⁴⁵ With reference to the critique of postmodernism, Walter Brueggemann argues that "the threat of unbridled relativism is not, in my judgment, much of a threat. In reality the dispute boils down to a few competing claims on any issue, and this is not the same as "anything goes." *Texts under Negotiation: the Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 9-10.

⁴⁶ Segovia, "Toward Intercultural Criticism," 323; Suzan Ilcan, "From Modernity to Postmodernity," in *Postmodernism and the Ethical Subject*, ed. Barbara Gabriel and Suzan Ilcan (Ithaca, NY: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 26.

groups.⁴⁷ Michel Foucault characterizes this phenomenon in terms of “the disqualified knowledges”, which are situated “low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity.” These knowledges are excluded or “disqualified” because in them reside the memory of hostile encounters or struggles which even up to the present have been deliberately relegated to the margins of knowledge.⁴⁸

As an exercise influenced to some extent by postmodernism, diaspora theology not only offers an implicit critique of the objectivism of the dominant center, but it also explodes the myth of uniformity. From a postmodernist perspective, an emphasis on plurality, difference, and, the marginal is a necessary alternative to objectivism and imposed uniformity, which serve to erase identities. Through a stress on pluralism, diaspora theology contributes to postmodernism’s primary goal, which is to interrupt the dominant center’s ability to enforce its view and to silence by a variety of forces all voices of marginality.⁴⁹ It seeks to bring to light and affirm, rather than bypass or submerge, situated knowledges of marginal and

⁴⁷ Ilcan, “From Modernity to Postmodernity,” 26; Here we are within Michel Foucault’s own discipline of history and with the people who acknowledge his influence, see Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988; Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies I: Writing on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982); See also Ileana Rodríguez ed., *The Latin American subaltern Studies Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interview and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 82-82.

⁴⁹ Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation*, 9.

subaltern groups.⁵⁰ In other words, it allows those in the margins to recognize that the ideology of the dominant culture is a self-seeking construction that may be legitimately critiqued. By finding its resonance in marginal voices, diaspora theology seeks to hear the voices of those living the experience of exile. Because the U.S. Hispanic American context provides the social location for diaspora theology, it is naturally drawn to the diasporic voice of the U.S. Hispanic immigrant.⁵¹ Diasporic theology is a theoretical framework that is forged by the experiences and perspectives of Hispanic immigrants in the United States.⁵² As this theology's primary spokesperson, Segovia recognizes that diaspora for many U.S. Hispanics involves migration.⁵³ The goal for diaspora theology, therefore, becomes more than just foregrounding a marginal voice. It seeks a critical engagement with the plethora of sociopolitical and sociocultural issues that surround U.S. Hispanic immigration. Diaspora theology is concerned to address the collective voice of a large and growing segment of Hispanic immigrants who are forced by a variety of circumstances to consider the United States as a surrogate homeland.

⁵⁰ Segovia, "Melting and Dreaming in America," 231.

⁵¹ Segovia, "Toward A Hermeneutic of the Diaspora," 58.

⁵² Segovia, "In the World but Not of It," 199; *Idem*, "Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Toward a Postcolonial Optic," in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 54.

⁵³ Segovia, "Toward A Hermeneutic of the Diaspora," 60.

Diaspora Theology as an Exercise in Postcolonialism

Postcolonial critique focuses on forces of oppression and coercive domination that operate in the contemporary world: the politics of anti-colonialism and neocolonialism, of race, gender, and nationalism, and of class and ethnicity, which define its terrain.⁵⁴ Postcolonial theory's intellectual commitment is to develop new forms of engaged theoretical work that contribute to dynamic ideological and social transformation.⁵⁵ Diaspora theology is also intensely stimulated by postcolonial imaginations and reflections. As R.S. Sugirtharajah suggests, postcolonialism "is an active confrontation with the dominant system of thought, its lopsidedness and inadequacies, and underlines its unsuitability."⁵⁶ This active confrontation is often referred to in postcolonial discourse as the initial step in the process of decolonization. This process is primarily directed toward subverting the prevailing logic and discourse of colonialism. Fundamental to this logic and discourse is a binomial opposition between the center and the margins, which entails and engenders, in turn, any number of subordinate binomials: civilized/uncivilized; advanced/primitive; cultured/ barbarian; progressive/ backward; developed/ undeveloped/ underdeveloped.⁵⁷ The process and program of postcolonialism,

⁵⁴ Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 11.

⁵⁵ Segovia, "Toward A Hermeneutic of the Diaspora," 60.

⁵⁶ R.S. Sugirtharajah, "A Postcolonial Exploration of Collusion and Construction in Biblical Interpretation," in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. *Idem* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1998), 93

therefore, involves the collapse of these binomials by those in the margins and decentering the ideological and economic power of the imperialists. More than just being an attack on old imperial centers and hegemonic Western ideologies, however, postcolonialism also strives for a retrieval and revalorization of the voices in the margins.⁵⁸ This other aspect of postcolonialism represents the process of liberation. In the words of Sugirtharajah, “it is a process of cultural and discursive emancipation from all dominant structures whether they are political, linguistic or ideological.” And it embraces the value and culture of colonial and former colonial peoples.

Postcolonialism plays a significant role in the formation of diaspora theology’s theoretical framework. Diaspora theology is ideologically conditioned to disrupt and eventually deconstruct Western colonial hegemony and to give voice and to provide the stimulus for action needed by marginal groups to experience liberation. As a paradigm that emerges from the margins, postcolonialism is the platform whereby diaspora theology works to engage in a critical conversation with the colonial systems that create and maintain the margins.⁵⁹ Not only does diaspora theology engage in the postcolonial process of decolonization, it also aims for the retrieval and revalorization of the full multiplicity of voices and perspectives

⁵⁷ Segovia, “In the World but Not of It,” 199.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Segovia, “Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies,” 53.

located in the margin, particularly of the exiled.⁶⁰ From the perspective of diaspora theology, this voice of marginality represents “the massive dispersion of the children of the Third World, the world of the politically and/ or economically colonized, in the First World, the world of the colonizers, of the political and/ or economic center.”⁶¹ It therefore naturally possesses a special affinity toward Hispanic American reality and experience of exile in the United States. Through its encounter with postcolonialism, diaspora theology understands that the reality of empire--of imperialism and colonialism--is an inescapable and overwhelming reality.⁶² By confronting that reality, diaspora theology is able to acknowledge the lived experiences of internal colonialism that by and large afflicts the Hispanic American population as a whole in the United States.⁶³ Diaspora theology therefore is an integral part of decolonization and liberation. Postcolonialism not only encourages diaspora theology to actively confront the darker image of the empire that creates and maintains the diaspora, but it also empowers it to give a voice to those who live the diasporic experience, and this in turn empowers them to seek liberation as valued persons.

⁶⁰ Segovia, “Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies,” 54.

⁶¹ Segovia, “Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora,” 58.

⁶² Segovia, “Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies,” 56.

⁶³ Ibid., 55. For further discussion on the Latin American experience, see J. Jorge Klor de Alva, "The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of 'Colonialism,' 'Postcolonialism,' and 'Mestizaje.'" in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. Gyan Prakash (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 241-275.

Diaspora Theology as an Exercise in Liberation Theology

Another important movement from which diaspora theology draws is liberation theology. Though appreciative of liberation theology's contribution to the original Latin American theological discourse, diaspora theology is primarily informed by the various current expressions of liberation theology. These current expressions emerge from the expanded use of liberation theology in places like Africa, Europe, and Asia particularly India. Diaspora theology, therefore, draws from a liberation theology that is expressed in various particular and localized forms on a globally universal scale.⁶⁴ This global perspective of liberation theology allows it to go beyond its original socioeconomic focus to include a wide variety of socioreligious and sociocultural emphases.⁶⁵ Furthermore, because it is strongly influenced by postmodernism and postcolonialism, such theology argues for the validity and dignity of those marginalized by imperialism and colonialism.⁶⁶ Such an, international liberation theology is a theological response to oppressive global forces emerging from imperial centers, particularly in the West. It brings to the center experiences of oppression and marginalization with the intent of humanizing and liberating those who suffer under oppression in every region of the world. This is a theology of struggle and resistance, but also a theology that leads to strategies for change and reformation from which hope emerges.

⁶⁴ Peter Beyer, "De-Centering Religious Singularity: The Globalization of Christianity as a Case in Point," *Numen* 50 (2003): 19.

⁶⁵ Segovia, "In the World but Not of It," 200.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 201.

The current global expressions of liberation theology have provided diaspora theology with a theological framework in which liberation of oppressed diasporic groups is paramount. This theology views the human and social impact of exile and return as both severely traumatic and transformative.⁶⁷ This dual experience contrasts a sense of “otherness” (i.e. the experience of exile) and a sense of “belonging.” (i.e. the experience of return). For diaspora theology, this deeply divided experience calls for liberation, which for many brings them hope.

In the exile, the world that is known and to which one belongs is left behind and replaced with a world that is strange and unfamiliar and within which one dwells as the “other.”⁶⁸ Those who are “other” typically live as strangers, as ones who do not fit in the unfamiliar world. But the sense of otherness, of being displaced or out of place, does not stop there. For now one who is exiled has also become stranger to the familiar world and its inhabitants one has left behind.⁶⁹ In time, this once familiar world turns increasingly into a world of memories and dreams. Soon, this sense of “otherness” encompasses both one’s birth world but also one’s adopted world; living between worlds, one is never totally part of either. It is this state of

⁶⁷ Segovia, “Toward Intercultural Criticism,” 328.

⁶⁸ Diaspora theology understands that this journey can take different forms, with varying implications and consequences for the individuals in question. It can range, in effect, from temporary exile, to sustained exile, to permanent exile or immigration. Exile can be either forced or chosen. Yet whatever its cause, exile always involves being separated from one’s home. Segovia’s personal experience of exile and return underlies his account of diaspora theology. “In the World but Not of It,” 203.

⁶⁹ Segovia, “Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora,” 65.

“otherness” that diaspora theology assesses and within which it encourages liberation, by considering the human and social impact of this hybrid existence of “otherness” in the exile. In the exile, one undergoes loss and dislocation, separation from home and isolated resettlement in the land of another. One experiences the angst of bifurcation and disorientation, rejection and discrimination, longing and anxiety.⁷⁰ It is in this strange, new, and often oppressive reality that the identity of an alienating otherness of the exile becomes forged.⁷¹ This otherness overwhelms and overrides one, depriving a person not only of a present, past, and future but also of self-definition, self-appropriation, and self-direction.⁷² Thus the exile is living in two worlds and no world at the same time, stripped of a voice and left to languish in deadening silence. Such a paradoxical and alienating situation means a continuous twofold existence as permanent strangers or aliens, as “other.”⁷³

The identity of “otherness,” is understood by seeing not only the result of displacement but also the newly created self, which, in the end, is not compatible with the hegemonic practices of the majority, be they social and economic status, religious affiliation and/or residential homogeneity.⁷⁴ A diasporic theological perspective places value on this changed identity of “otherness,” and uses it as a

⁷⁰ Segovia, “In the World but Not of It,” 213.

⁷¹ Ibid., 203.

⁷² Segovia, “Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora,” 64.

⁷³ Ibid., 63.

⁷⁴ David Newman, “On Borders and Power: A Theoretical Framework,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 18 (Spring 2003), 14.

model for creating social change. In other words, though “otherness” is an outcome of displacement, this experience can be utilized in ways that counter the forces that cause displacement. One way this can be achieved is by telling the history of otherness both its positive and negative dimensions.

Within the context of return, the process of “otherness” is suspended by the strong feelings of home. In the return journey, the growing sense of “otherness” is initially stunned by the intense onset of old memories of life in the homeland.⁷⁵ This can be described as a sense of “belonging,” in which the memories and dreams of the world of birth are temporarily brought to life.⁷⁶ As these sentiments settle, the sense of “otherness” is eventually relived through the experience of return. Although the sense of “belonging” is reinvigorated and reinforced through the journey of return, one cannot avoid the sense of “otherness” created by the journey of exile.⁷⁷ In the experience of exile, the sense of “otherness” slowly replaces the

⁷⁵ In remembering life in his homeland, Segovia states, “Going through customs for departure, I was asked whether the trip had been fulfilling for me and then invited to return. In between: openness, helpfulness, friendliness. Such was the Cuba I remembered. I was overjoyed to see and feel, such sentiments again, . . . “Forty Years Later: Reflections on Going Home,” 11.

⁷⁶ In his return to Cuba, Segovia states, “Throughout, not only did I feel Cuban again, in a way that I had not experienced in decades, not even in Miami, but also I was acknowledged as Cuban everywhere and everybody.” “Forty Years Later: Reflections on Going Home,” 11.

⁷⁷ Segovia states, “Indeed, I walked through the city with full remembrance of things and places, people and events, dates and stories. I knew where to go and where to turn, what I would find and what had happened there. I was in my city and among my people, and my memory, physically triggered into action after a long hiatus, gushed abundantly and endlessly. “Forty Years Later: Reflections on Going Home,” 11.

sense of belonging, whereas in the return experience, both the sense of “otherness” and “belonging” irreversibly coexist.⁷⁸ In the return, the inside world and the outside world merge into two places, resulting in a metaphorical lack of space on which to stand.⁷⁹

It is this mixture of places that the dominant center regards as highly problematic and offensive; the culture of the imperial power clashes with that of its victims; the immigrant is trapped between his or her own culture and the dominant imperial culture.⁸⁰ For diaspora theology, liberation from this trap or clash comes by emphasizing and embracing this unique mixture of “otherness” and “belonging.” These two experiences allow one to know two separate worlds, together. This unique perspective enables one to offer an informed critique of each world--its visions, its values, its traditions.⁸¹ It is from this point of reference that liberation is grounded. Through an informed critique of the world of birth and the world of unfamiliarity, diaspora theology is able to acknowledge and respect the otherness of those whose very alien existence is overwhelmed and manipulated. It is liberating to those who are subjugated, exploited, and denigrated as the other by various imperial structures and strategies. For diaspora theology, the objective is to

⁷⁸ Segovia, “In the World but Not of It,” 203.

⁷⁹ Segovia, “Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora,” 63.

⁸⁰ Saree S. Makdisi, “*The Empire Renarrated: Season of Migration to the North and the Reinvention of the Present*,” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1994), 537.

⁸¹ Segovia, “Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora,” 65.

free the margins from the dehumanizing control of the center. Such a theology seeks to construct a better world in which all peoples, their cultures and their experience are valued.⁸²

The Reading Strategy of Diaspora Theology

From this theoretical framework of diaspora theology, we also find a reading strategy for examining the biblical text's portrayal of the diasporic experience.⁸³ This reading strategy holds important the biblical text's diversity and pluralism; perspective and contextualization; and social location of a perspective and foundations of its constructions are its major characteristics.⁸⁴ This reading strategy calls into question any claim to be objective and scientific, neutral and impartial, universal and eternal. It opts for humanization and diversity. On a basic level, this reading strategy has three inevitably interrelated elements: the texts, the readers of those texts, and those readers' particular readings of the texts. Meaning is achieved through the interaction of these three elements. Moreover, their interaction creates a reading of resistance that involves critical dialogue and struggle with the text, the

⁸² Segovia, "Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora," 62.

⁸³ Though the theoretical language describing the proposed reading strategy is taken from Segovia's discussions on diaspora hermeneutics, and intercultural criticism, one can argue that it still remains fundamentally diaspora theology. All of Segovia's methodological approaches to reading texts of the diasporic experience are ultimately grounded in a theology of the diaspora. "Toward Intercultural Criticism," 321; *Idem*, "Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora," 59.

⁸⁴ Segovia, "In the World but Not of it," 217.

reader, and with readings of texts. Rather than benignly and irenically assessing texts, it engages them courageously by foregrounding issues of opposition, of prejudice and discrimination, of travail, of poverty and exploitation.⁸⁵

A Focus on Texts as Contextual Products

The reading strategy of diaspora theology understands all texts, including the biblical text, to be literary, rhetorical, and ideological products in their own right. They represent artistic constructions that contain underlying strategic concerns and goals.⁸⁶ As contextual products, texts possess their own words and visions, which allow them to speak on their own, to unravel their own narrative, and to define their own identity.⁸⁷ All texts are considered socially and culturally conditioned, which lends them to having very different historical situations and cultural matrices.⁸⁸ Thus, in reading texts that reveal the diasporic experience, it is crucial that texts' unique histories and cultures be acknowledged, valued, and analyzed, and equally that these texts are understood to have constructed contextualized views of the diasporic experience by means of literary and rhetorical features.⁸⁹ The reading strategy of diaspora theology opts for a combination of formalist, practical, and cultural approaches to unpack these features.

⁸⁵ Segovia, "Toward Intercultural Criticism," 327.

⁸⁶ Segovia, "Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora," 69.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Segovia, "Toward Intercultural Criticism," 324.

A Focus on Readers and Their Readings of Texts

Meaning is produced through the dynamic interaction between texts, readers, and readings. All readers and readings interpret texts in their own particular ways at their particular times and from their particular places. The interaction between texts, reader and readings is not a neutral encounter between three independent worlds. Readers function as inevitable and ever-present filters producing varieties of readings of texts. They play a major role in the very identification and articulation of a text's literary structure and development, its rhetorical concerns and aims, its ideological thrust, and its relationship to its historical and cultural matrix.⁹⁰ In producing a reading of texts of the diasporic experience, one must critically engage the text in a way that adds to the spectrum of already established readings of the text. This critical engagement involves a dialogue and engagement of the text in light of a reader's own reality and experience. Producing a reading of the text also entails foregrounding how other readings interpreted the text.⁹¹ The reading strategy of diaspora theology sees itself not as the one, sole, and definitive reading strategy of texts that reveal the diasporic experience. Even so, its grounding in the reality and experience of the exile allows it to emerge as an enormously useful strategy for producing a rich reading of texts that speak of exile and return.⁹² It recognizes readers and their readings of texts, even the most ideal and informed

⁹⁰ Segovia, "Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora," 72.

⁹¹ Segovia, "Toward Intercultural Criticism," 329.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 330.

readers and readings, as products of historical and cultural constructions that involve views of the past, the present, and the future. In the end, the different social contexts from which readers and their readings emerge influence the overall reading and interpretation of texts.⁹³

Texts that Reveal the Diasporic Experience

For the reading strategy of diaspora theology, texts oriented toward exile have elements that speak of the reality of empire.⁹⁴ For diaspora theology, these responses reconstruct the human struggle of forcible removal from the world of birth to the world under imperial control and power. Whether from ancient or modern time, they have the possibility of representing literary expressions of resistance by marginalized people to the social and ideological threats of conquering or dominant authority.⁹⁵ The concern of this type of literature lends the proposed strategy to a reading of the Babylonian Exile in the broader context of the literature of modern immigrant groups, including the U.S. Hispanic immigrant community. Within this broader context, there lies a disturbing modern analogy with the Judean exilic experience in which one can identify massive dispersions from the non-Western world to the Western world.⁹⁶ This call to go beyond

⁹³ Segovia, "Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora," 69.

⁹⁴ Segovia, "In the World but Not of It," 203.

⁹⁵ Smith, *The Religion of the Landless*, 13.

⁹⁶ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 103.

canonical boundaries to other exile-oriented literature allows readers to comprehend the biblical text more fully.⁹⁷ Both the ancient and the modern experiences of exile and return are located within a common thematic spectrum, which allows for a careful consideration of analogous situations. Reading across this spectrum in a mode of comparison creates space for the Babylonian Exile to inform the U.S. Hispanic immigrant experience and visa versa. From this perspective, the exile-oriented texts in the Bible give status and dignity to the U.S. Hispanic immigrant experience while the immigrant experience lends contemporary experience to the reading of the biblical text from centuries ago and from a different geographical, social, and cultural location. In the words of Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “Such a wider lens is required for a deeper appreciation of the events of the Babylonian exile of the Jews.”⁹⁸

As one who is ethnically a Mexican American from the Southwest and is academically situated within Hebrew Bible scholarship, for me the modern Mexican immigrant experience suggests for me important analogies to the experience of exile and return depicted in Second Isaiah (40-55). The social events and values that become operative for Mexican immigrants in economic conditions of forced removal and settlement under imperial control and power can inform the prophetic/poetic response to exile and return in Second Isaiah. These economic conditions represent a capitalist mode of material production that requires power of

⁹⁷ Smith, *The Religion of the Landless*, 13.

⁹⁸ Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 29.

labor. With its development, the geographical migration of people both within and across national boundaries has become integral to the continued existence of the empire. Therefore, the migration of many Mexican nationals has become a structural characteristic of the capitalist mode of production carried out in its most effective manner in the United States. The reproduction of capitalist relations of production has become dependent on obtaining labor power from outside national boundaries.⁹⁹ Such a comparative analysis is not a benign assessment of displaced populations, but a serious critique of the colonial and imperialistic forces that overshadow them.¹⁰⁰ Because this strategy necessitates a stance of dispute, disagreement, and controversy over symbols of power and empire, readers are predisposed to create alternative ways of liberation.¹⁰¹ Integral to this liberation

⁹⁹ Robert Miles, *Racism and Migrant Labour* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1982), 159-62. See also Jorge Ramos, *Morir en el intento: La peor tragedia de inmigrantes en la historia de los Estados Unidos* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005). Enrique Ortega, survivor of the trailer incident involving 19 dead immigrants in Southeast Texas, testifies to the better wages in Houston. The wages in Mexico cannot compete with the wages found in the more robust capitalist economy in the US.

¹⁰⁰ Fernando F. Segovia, "Reading-Across: Intercultural Criticism and Textual Posture," in *Interpreting Beyond Borders*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 67.

¹⁰¹ According to Segovia, "It continues to break down the traditional and fundamental Eurocentric moorings and boundaries of the discipline in favor of a multidimensional and de-centered mode of discourse, a global discourse in which all readers have a voice and engage one another out of their own respective social locations, out of their otherness." "Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora," 59.

project should be the acknowledgment and respect for the otherness of those who are subjugated, exploited, and denigrated as the “other” of empire.¹⁰²

The Goal of Diaspora Theology

Taking up an optic of diaspora theology means to orient oneself toward a specific vision that seeks to retrieve and revalorize the marginalized voices heard in the biblical and immigrant responses to exile and return. Doing this requires decolonizing the colonial and imperialistic primary boundary for constructing reality, the “we”/center and the “they”/margin.¹⁰³ In foregrounding the context of empire and its construction and maintenance of oppressive boundaries, the fundamental goal is liberation of the margins.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, diaspora theology represents a political/theological analysis that focuses on the liberation of the margins from the dehumanizing control of the empire.¹⁰⁵

Being rooted in the perspective of a Cuban exiled, diaspora theology naturally gravitates to a U.S. Hispanic response to exile and return. For many first generation U.S. Hispanic immigrants, the biblical categories of exile and return are analogous to their own migratory experiences. These categories create an interface in which the biblical material and the U.S. Hispanic immigrant experience can interact in a way that is mutually informative and illuminating. Coupled with the theoretical

¹⁰² Segovia, “Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora,” 59.

¹⁰³ Segovia, “In the World but Not of It,” 200.

¹⁰⁴ Segovia, “Melting and Dreaming in America,” 263.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

direction of diaspora theology, this interaction is not only informative but also politically empowering. As a Mexican American from the Southwest, for me adopting an optic of diaspora theology means bringing dignity and a sense of belonging to the Mexican immigrant experience.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, in reading across texts of the Mexican migratory experience and of the Judean diasporic experience in Second Isaiah (40-55), my goal is to acknowledge and respect the otherness of those whose “otherness” is overwhelmed and manipulated by the symbols of power and empire.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

The diasporic subcategories of exile and return in the Bible inform the comparative analysis of the Babylonian exile and the Mexican immigrant experience. Yet, the task of critically evaluating the specific sociopolitical and socioreligious aspects of these particular diasporic experiences requires more than just organizing subcategories. Assisting in this task is the theoretical framework of diaspora theology. Among the more salient theoretical capacities of diaspora theology is its call for interaction between various socially conditioned texts, especially those shaped by the features of exile and return. Diaspora theology

¹⁰⁶ In a recent poll of U.S. Hispanics conducted by Time magazine, Hispanics are 14% of the U.S. population. About half were born outside the U.S. and about 58% of the total U.S. Hispanic immigration comes from Mexico. *Time Magazine*, “Time Poll of U.S. Hispanics: Inside America’s Largest Minority,” August 22, 2005.

¹⁰⁷ Segovia, “Melting and Dreaming in America,” 263.

considers “a multitude of constructs reflecting and engaging a variety of realities and experiences across history and culture.”¹⁰⁸

The texts that come more naturally to the fore in the analytical process are those that themselves emerge out of the context of exile and return. My proposed reading strategy, which understands texts, readers and their readings all to be essential partners in the interpretive process.

The texts for this project are about the Mexican immigrant experience and the exile and return-oriented biblical texts in Second Isaiah. In reading about these two experiences with the proposed optic, the two narratives are brought into critical dialogue for the purpose of giving voice not only to the biblical text but also to the present immigrant experience. This critical interaction allows the exile and return-oriented biblical texts to provide status, dignity, and explanation for the Mexican immigrant experience. In turn, texts about the Mexican immigrant experience inform the biblical texts, and this expands our understanding of the Bible and offers new perspectives for biblical analysis.

As a reading strategy, diaspora theology engages in a cultural exchange between a sacred exilic experience, given sanctity by its presence in Scripture, and an obscure exilic experience of the silenced immigrant for the purpose of liberating voices of marginality. In reading texts of exile and return, diaspora theology reviews and re-considers all diasporic experiences as worthy of analysis. Although the hermeneutical understanding is grounded in the experiences of U.S. Hispanic

¹⁰⁸ Segovia, “In the World but Not of It,” 199.

immigrants, the primary reading strategy of diaspora theology is to retrieve and revalorize the marginalized matrices and voices of the diasporic experience for all similar groups.¹⁰⁹ These voices contain elements of discrimination, travail, exploitation, and survival in the exile.¹¹⁰ Therefore, marginalized voices are acknowledged through the interaction of the lesser known exile-oriented texts of modern Mexican immigration with the exile-oriented biblical texts. This interaction not only confronts with pressing ethical issues, but also deconstructs the privileging of the center over the margins. The goal of the deconstruction of the imperial mechanisms that produce massive territorial displacements of people is liberation of the margins from the dehumanizing control of the center.¹¹¹

For Hispanics within the U.S. Southwest, diaspora theology provides a theological perspective that is informed by the physical journey experience of the Cuban diaspora. To inform this theology, the proposed comparative analysis of the Mexican immigrant experience and the voice exile and return in Second Isaiah are rich resources. Over against a strictly sociological framework, diaspora theology is also able to deal with the religious issues that emerge in the comparative analysis of the Mexican immigrant experience and in the Judean exile and return in Second Isaiah. This theology is attuned to the socio-political and cultural aspects inherent

¹⁰⁹ Segovia, "Melting and Dreaming in America," 260.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹¹¹ Segovia, "In the World but Not of It," 203; *Idem*, "Postcolonial and Diaspora Criticism in Biblical Studies: Focus, Parameters, Relevance," *Studies in World Christianity* 6 (1999): 182.

in the categories of exile and return for it has emerged from this experience in many places and times. What makes the theology of diaspora useful in this regard is that it embodies the idea of a physical journey. It is a journey in which “that which is known and to which one belongs is left behind for an encounter with that which is unknown and within which one dwells as ‘other.’”¹¹² The “other” is the permanent alien or stranger, who becomes other both in the place from which they came and in the place in which they find themselves.¹¹³ As the “other,” they find themselves to be “silenced and speechless” in their new context for the voice is not authentically heard.¹¹⁴ It is the voice of the “other” who has journeyed from a place of origin to the place of exile. It is this “other” brought into bondage by empire that diaspora theology aims to liberate.

¹¹² Segovia, “In the World but Not of It,” 263.

¹¹³ Segovia, “Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora,” 64.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

Chapter Three

The Causal Connections of Empire with Exile and Return

In using an optic of diaspora theology, it is paramount to dialogue critically with a variety of texts.¹¹⁵ Therefore, entering into the reality and experience of the exile and return requires reading and interpreting both biblical and nonbiblical texts.¹¹⁶ Among the most vivid biblical texts of the diasporic experience are those that represent the Babylonian exile and subsequent return in the sixth century BCE. Yet, one also encounters exile and return in texts outside of the biblical canon.¹¹⁷ Thus, the experience of and texts about the Mexican immigrant experience in the U.S. prove to be equally palpable and compelling.¹¹⁸ The Mexican immigrant's experience is intensely compelling primarily because of the horrific loss of human life.¹¹⁹ In their attempts to cross into California, New Mexico and Texas, hundreds

¹¹⁵ Segovia, "Toward Intercultural Criticism," 322.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 327.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 329.

¹¹⁸ For many that come from this social location, the experience of oppression and marginalization comes as a result of the U.S. annexation of the formerly Mexican territories of the Southwest. *Ibid.*, 323.

¹¹⁹ Among the 19 dead migrants, who were found in the trailer in the 2003 Southeast Texas incident, was a five year old boy clinging to his dead father, Ramos, *Morir en el intento*, 5.

of Mexican immigrants have died from hunger, dehydration or after being abandoned in hostile conditions by smugglers.¹²⁰

Both the biblical texts and this broader Mexican immigrant context construct views of exile and return that have been conditioned by sociopolitical and socioeconomic realities. Incubating these realities is the reality of empire of imperialism and colonialism. Though the Babylonian exile and Mexican immigration represent very different historical situations and cultural matrices, they both emerge from a context of varying imperial/colonial formations.¹²¹ For both the ancient group and the contemporary group, the reality of empire plays a significant role in their forced dispersal and subsequent return.

The main purpose of this chapter is therefore to acknowledge, analyze, and critique the reality of empire in both the biblical context and the Mexican immigrant experience. First, I survey selected exile and return-oriented biblical texts that were formed under the shadows of the Babylonian and Persian empires--two empires that played a significant role in shaping the biblical text's portrayal of exile and return.¹²² Within this survey of biblical texts, the discussion describes

¹²⁰ Rick Ufford-Chase, "Crisis on the Mexican Border: Dying to Get In," *Christian Century* (2004): 20; Ramos, *Morir en el intento*; Karl Eschbach, Jacqueline Hagan, Nestor Rodriguez, Ruben Hernandez-Leon, and Stanley Baily, "Death at the Border," *International Migration Review* 1999.

¹²¹ Segovia, "Interpreting Beyond Borders," 23.

¹²² Although the northern tribes were exiled to Assyria in the eighth century, Walter Brueggemann argues that the sixth-century Jews in Babylonia provide the central image of exile for the Bible. *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 8.

and categorizes the language about empire from the point of view of a subjugated Judean community. Second, I survey a selection of sociopolitical and socioeconomic experts who acknowledge a causal connection between the Mexican immigration experience and the U.S. global economic empire.¹²³ Hence, this chapter's aim is to provide a composite portrait of empire and its influence in both the Judean exile and return and the Mexican immigration experience. It furthermore lays the foundation for comparing the poetics, rhetoric, and ideology of Second Isaiah 40-55 with the artistic/literary response to U.S. immigration by contemporary Mexican immigrants.

Biblical Literature of Exile and Return under the Shadow of Empire

The sixth-century Judean experience of exile and return reflected in the Hebrew Bible is situated within the reality of empire. In other words, the diasporic existence of the Judean community is a product of a succession of empires, the Babylonian and the Persian. Marking the Judean experience of exile in six-century BCE is the Neo-Babylonian empire. By contrast, the return from exile appears in the biblical text as a Persian imperial project. Using selected biblical texts of exile and return, the following discussion does more than describe the reality of empire; it examines the human and social impact of empire on the diasporic Judean community.

¹²³ James Kurth, "Migration and the Dynamic of Empire," *The National Interest* 71 (Spring 2003): 5.

Exile-Oriented Biblical Texts and the Babylonian Empire

The image of empire that is constructed in the biblical texts of exile is the product of a community that has been subjugated, exploited, and denigrated as the ‘other’ of the empire. In his recent overview of the Neo-Babylonian empire, David Vanderhooft states the following:

Empire is fundamentally a dyadic relationship involving a superior and inferior group. Babylonia was politically dominant, and asserted as a corollary of that dominance the supremacy of its imperial ideas. Resistance to and acquiescence in these ideas would naturally have developed among conquered people.¹²⁴

Hans M. Barstad reminds us that the Neo-Babylonian empire represented an enormous military and administrative system that served to secure a constant flow of goods from the peripheral, conquered territories into the center of the empire.¹²⁵ Under King Nebuchadnezzar, the Neo-Babylonian imperial policies had become aggressively expansionistic and monetarily motivated.¹²⁶ It is within this imposing reality of empire that one must situate the biblical texts of exile in the early sixth century BCE.

¹²⁴ David Stephen Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylonia in the Latter Prophets*, (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999), 114.

¹²⁵ Hans M. Barstad, “After the “Myth of the Empty Land,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake, ID: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 10.

¹²⁶ Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylonia*, 61-114.

In 2 Kings, the reality of empire enters into the author's speech about exile. In 2 Kings 24:14-16, Babylonia's territorial expansion into the land of Judah is vividly recounted:

He carried away all Jerusalem, all the officials, all the warriors, ten thousand captives, all the artisans and the smiths; no one remained, except the poorest people of the land. The king of Babylonia brought captive to Babylonia all the men of valor, seven thousand, the artisans and the smiths, one thousand, all of them strong and fit for war.¹²⁷

With what constitutes the first deportation in 597 BCE, the Neo-Babylonian empire under king Nebuchadnezzar shattered the Judean monarchy, plundered the city, and exiled the people from the land.¹²⁸ For the Neo-Babylonian empire, military conquest necessitates the exile and exploitation of skilled labor. As indicated by Vanderhooft, "the immense building projects that Nebuchadnezzar initiated in the heartland no doubt required infusions of labor, as several of his building inscriptions emphasize."¹²⁹

In these texts, the exilic experience of the Judean community is not depicted as some *ad hoc* imperial strategy. It fulfills a socioeconomic necessity, and this in turn requires the displacement and exploitation of a specialized labor force, such as military personnel, fortification engineers, the king and the entire royal house in

¹²⁷ Unless otherwise noted, biblical quotations are from the NRSV.

¹²⁸ Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century BCE*, trans. David Green (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 11.

¹²⁹ Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylonia*, 111.

Jerusalem. Its fundamental imperial aim is to violently procure established forms of wealth production and accumulation in Judah's capital.¹³⁰

The exile not only represented a socioeconomic necessity of the Neo-Babylonian empire, but also defined the beginning of a new social reality.¹³¹ According to v. 14, this reality had widespread social impact, "He carried all Jerusalem, all the officials, all the warriors . . ." In other words, the forces of the empire had extensive dissemination, which in turn marked the end of everything that defined Judah as a people and as a nation.¹³² Writing about this all encompassing reality of empire under Nebuchanezzar, Vanderhooft reminds us that, "Nebuchadnezzar declared in numerous inscriptions that he brought the widespread people into the eternal shadow of Babylonia, and that he beautified no other place on earth like it."¹³³

In 2 Kings 25:10 -11, the second deportation of the Judean community is also envisioned and reconstructed around the reality of the Babylonian empire:

All the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had defected to the king of Babylonia-- all the rest of the population.

¹³⁰ Barstad, "After the "Myth of the Empty Land," 11.

¹³¹ Walter Brueggemann, "At the Mercy of Babylonia: A Subversive Rereading of the Empire," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991): 2.

¹³² Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 11.

¹³³ Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylonia*, 57.

Leading the military conquest of Jerusalem and the exile of the Judean community is Nebuzaradan, the captain of the Babylonian-controlled Chaldean army.¹³⁴ The massive deportation of able bodied Judeans remains a primary imperial mechanism of the Neo-Babylonian empire. With the exile comes the replacement of Judah's historical center, Jerusalem, with its new center, Babylonia. Hence, the reality of empire for the Judean community is not only one of a renewed center of power, but also the total destruction of cherished boundaries. Among the most precious boundary it lost was the one defined by the land itself: "So Judah went into exile out of its land" (v.21b). The loss of land was the greatest loss of all for the people of Judah, as Walter Brueggemann writes:

The exile is for the Bible the sharpest point of discontinuity when none of the old traditions or conventional institutions any longer seem valid or trustworthy. Exile without land or even prospect of land was indeed Israel's null point when every promise seemed void.¹³⁵

Throughout 2 Kings 24-25, the exile of the Judean community represents more than just a consequence of war and conquest. It functions as a mechanism that mediated the socioeconomic ideas of the Neo-Babylonian empire.

Another biblical source that speaks of empire and exile is in the retrospective vision of 2 Chronicles 36. Verses 19-20 describe how the exile is accompanied by the destructive invasion of the Babylonian imperial forces:

They burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels.

¹³⁴ Smith, *The Religion of the Landless*, 21.

¹³⁵ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 9.

He took into exile in Babylonia those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia.

For the Chronicler, empire and exile are more than that: they are inextricably connected to God's punishment and judgment. The exile-oriented text in chapter 36 makes clear that it was ultimately the peoples' mockery, their disregard of the prophets, and their profanation of the temple that brought about the exile (36:12-13, 16).¹³⁶ In these texts, every effort is made to avoid characterizing the exile as a stroke of fate, presenting it instead as God's just and fitting punishment for human misconduct.¹³⁷ Though exile is understood as an instrument of divine judgment, its impact on the Judean population is described on a sociopolitical and socioeconomic level. In other words, the exile of the Judean community to Babylonia is still essentially an imperial mechanism for exploiting a needed labor force. Vanderhooft writes, "On a mundane level, the supply of precious and manufactured items, raw materials, and workmen for Babylonia and for the principal cities of Babylonia is often emphasized in Nebuchadnezzar's inscriptions."¹³⁸ Again, the idea of exploitation of skilled labor remains at the forefront of these texts' portrayal of the Neo-Babylonian empire, "He took into exile in Babylonia those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him . . ." (v.20). Though the exile is

¹³⁶ Baruch Halpern, "Why Manasseh is Blamed for the Babyloniaian Exile: The Evolution of a Biblical Tradition," *Vetus Testamentum* 48 (1998): 485.

¹³⁷ Alibert, *Israel in Exile*, 15.

¹³⁸ Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babyloniaian Empire and Babylonia*, 45.

primarily understood to embody the judgment of God, one's assessment of these texts cannot dismiss the human and social impact of the exile.¹³⁹ Furthermore, this statement is followed by reference to the Persian empire, which initiated their return from exile. For the Chronicler, both the exile and return are understood as primary features of the prevailing empire. The Neo-Babylonian and Persian empires form the underlying system of periodization for the Chronicler.¹⁴⁰ In other words, history is remembered in terms of hegemonic powers and their corresponding ambitions for the Judean community.

In moving to the prophetic writings, Jeremiah emerges as a book that presents exile in conjunction with empire. Though the book of Jeremiah is difficult to date with any precision, it can surely be located in the period just before and just after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE.¹⁴¹ Throughout the book, the exile constitutes an experience that is primarily determined by the Babylonian empire. In Jeremiah 29:4-7, the prophet concedes to the supremacy of the Babylonian empire and commissions the exiles to do the same:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylonia. Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and

¹³⁹ Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 32.

¹⁴⁰ Sara Japhet, "Periodization: Between History and Ideology," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babyloniaian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 83.

¹⁴¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 10.

daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

In these texts, the city of Babylonia represents the new political capital for the exiled Judean community. According to Rainer Albertz, the new political and economic epicenter united the empire and at the same time demanded extraordinary resources.¹⁴² Similar to other exile-oriented biblical texts, the prophet presents the exile as a necessary imperial mechanism for the development and maintenance of an integrated legal and economic system.¹⁴³ The exiles, mostly comprised of the *intelligentsia* of Judah, are to “build houses” and “plant gardens” (v.5). As for them, for many deported Judeans, the exile represented a shift in social and political roles. From holding central roles in the maintenance of Judean intellectual, political, and religious society, their contribution to the new empire became primarily manual in nature, which suggests their marginal existence in Babylonian society. In verse 7, this decentered existence becomes even more vivid. The peace that was once sought for Jerusalem (cf. Ps 122:6) is to be sought for the exiles’ new world center, Babylonia. In the words of John Hill:

Prayer for the welfare of Jerusalem is turned into praying for the welfare of the city which is Jerusalem’s conqueror. . . . The place now in which Yhwh is to be found is not in the Jerusalem temple, but in the city of the conqueror, an alien and unclean place.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 60.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁴⁴ John Hill, *Friend or Foe? The Figure of Babylonia in the Book of Jeremiah MT* (Boston: Brill, 1999), 151-52.

This shift in national allegiance would have had several implications for the social and religious identity of the exilic Judean community. The result of pressuring all exiles to submit to the established Babylonian culture is the deliberate annihilation of their Judean ethnicity. From the point of view of the prophet, assimilation to Babylonian cultural identity not only appears to be the preeminent mode for avoiding conflict and preserving order, but also a nationalizing policy¹⁴⁵.

In contrast to a peaceful submission to Babylonian culture, the prophet presents an episode of punishment toward those who desert the empire's national purpose. In Jeremiah 39, the Neo-Babylonian empire not only exercises its physical force over its new territory but also sends into exile those who desert the national purpose:

The Chaldeans burned the king's house and the houses of the people, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem. Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard exiled to Babylonia the rest of the people who were left in the city, those who had deserted to him, and the people who remained (vv8-9).

Through the efforts of the previously conquered army, the Babylonian empire lays siege on the Judean capital. With the fall of Jerusalem, the reality of empire insists on destroying the socio-religious and socio-political identity of the Judean community. Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple razed to the ground, national sovereignty came to an end (Ps 74; Lamentations). The dissolution of this realm had a radical impact on all aspects of national and religious life and on all strata of

¹⁴⁵ Psalm 137 could be read as the negative effects of this nationalizing policy.

society.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, the burning of houses, which was the destruction of a formative symbol of Hebrew culture (cf. Deut 6:9), also indicates a severe blow to Judean identity. The pain of loss of the religious and social institutions (i.e. temple, Jerusalem, king, houses) that defined Judean identity is ultimately transformed into the voice of lamentation (cf. Ps 137, Lam 1).

Nevertheless, not all imperial procedures of conquest appear destructive and exploitive to the Judean community. In Jeremiah 39:10, the prophet seems to identify a benevolent act on the part of the empire in which Nebuzaradan allots to the poor the property confiscated from the deportees: “Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left in the land of Judah some of the poor people who owned nothing, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.”¹⁴⁷ Yet such acts are the exception and they are ambiguous. As Hans M, Barstad reminds us, the pervading objective of the Neo-Babylonian empire was to exploit foreign resources (here the Chaldean army). Having few natural resources of its own, the Neo-Babylonian empire depended for its existence on the import of materials such as metals, stones, timber, and all sorts of food and luxury items. Babylonia was a site for immense concentration of economic power, while Jerusalem suffered excessive declines.¹⁴⁸ The giving of land to the poor group that remained in Judah may in fact suggest more of a malevolent act of the empire, for selecting the poor as the beneficiaries of

¹⁴⁶ Talmon, “Restoration in Ancient Judaism,” 121.

¹⁴⁷ Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 13.

¹⁴⁸ Barstad, “After the “Myth of the Empty Land,” 11.

land may reflect the empire's move to avoid having a possible militant group. These poor would have guaranteed the empire a docile and submissive labor force in its newly conquered territory. By leaving a group of poor people, the Neo-Babylonian empire was most likely interested in foreign investment, even at the cost of traditional Judean culture and values. And yet this treatment of the poor does not appear to have been a policy that encompassed all the poor in the land. For according to Jeremiah 52 verse 15, some of the poor were also exiled to Babylonia:

Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile some of the poorest of the people and the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had defected to the king of Babylonia, together with the rest of the artisans.

The destruction of the city is followed by the deportation of various groups of people including “some of the poorest people” (וּמִדְּלוֹת הָעָם). Along with the artisans, the poor are also funneled to the center of the empire.

In reading through these selected exile-oriented texts, the malevolent reality of empire becomes clear. The imperial mechanisms mediated acts of exploitation, such as the destruction of home and identity and the exile of a selected labor force. It is this kind of imperial structure that constitutes the framework into which one must read the exile experience of the Judean community. Indeed, the military campaigns were motivated to a large degree by a desire to take war spoils to Nebuchadnezzar's ambitious rebuilding of Babylon and twelve other cities in Babylonia.¹⁴⁹ As a result the empire not only entailed the disruption caused by

¹⁴⁹ Bill T. Arnold, *Who Were the Babylonians?* (Boston: Brill, 2005), 96.

relocation, the demands of forced labor, and dispersal; it also symbolized the source of its psychological trauma (cf. Ps 137). Moreover, a depressing sense of helplessness, an inability to influence the course of political events subsequently exploded in a violent desire for vengeance on the Neo-Babylonian empire (137:7-9).¹⁵⁰

Return-Oriented Biblical Texts and the Persian Empire

Modern historiography normally dates the initial return of the Judean exiles to 539 BCE, the year Persia emerged as the ruling world empire.¹⁵¹ The biblical texts about the return experience are ambivalent in their depiction of the Persian empire. In some instances, the biblical literature suggests that it is the benevolence of the Persian emperors that permitted deported groups to return to their homeland.¹⁵² Though joy and relief play a significant role in the biblical depiction of the exiles' return experience (Is 49), one cannot ignore the presence of empire in this experience. Outside the prophetic material, the book of Ezra places the return of the Judean exiles within the confines of empire. Throughout the book, symbols of dominance or expressions of imperial prerogative combine to underscore the reality of empire in the return experience of the Judean exiles.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 104-105.

¹⁵¹ Jon L. Berquist, "Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives for Canonization," *Semeia* 76 (1996): 16.

¹⁵² Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 91.

¹⁵³ Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 40.

There are two different returns from Babylon recorded in the book of Ezra, one led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 1-2), and the other led by Ezra (Ezra 7-8). Details about these returns are couched in royal edicts and various official correspondences scattered throughout the book. It is within this imperial framework that the return experience of the Judean exiles is recounted.

At the beginning of the book of Ezra (Ezra 1:1-3b), the Persian king Cyrus issues an edict that authorizes the Judean exiles in Babylon to return and rebuild the temple (Ez 1:3-4):

“Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of those among you who are of his people--may their God be with them! --are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel--he is the God who is in Jerusalem;”

The return of the Judean exiles is placed in an imperially-determined framework of the Persian empire. Though the memory of a return remained part of the exiled Judean community’s consciousness (cf. Ps137), the actual right to return could only be sanctioned by the empire. This return project that was imperially devised also included a specific agenda, which was to rebuild the “the house of the Lord.” It was a return policy coupled with a major construction project sanctioned by an empire motivated by the administrative interests of the empire and not by religious zeal.¹⁵⁴ Cyrus’ return option appears to be a way of stimulating the economy through the

¹⁵⁴ James M. Trotter, “Was the Second Jerusalem Temple a Primarily Persian Project,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 15 (2001): 15-16. Trotter, “Was the Second Jerusalem,” 15-16.

re-establishment of a traditional urban cultic center.¹⁵⁵ The temple furnished a central location for provincial administration and merged the administrative interests of the empire with the religious traditions of the local population.¹⁵⁶ The construction of a major Jewish institution would have been a very effective strategy for ensuring stability in a colonial holding on the fringe of the empire. Though the choice to return lies within the control of the Judean exiles, the return option itself, with its goals and objectives, are devised and determined by the empire.

After several generations of life in exile, the empire's return policy is quite inconsiderate of the exiles' religious structures that had emerged in the absence of the Temple. Whereas the biblical text reveals a leadership structure in exile that was in the hands of elders and heads of families (Jer 29:1; Ez 8:1, 14:1, 20:1) and a corporate life that included religious observances of prayer and fasting (Jer 29:7; Zech 8:18-19),¹⁵⁷ these socio-religious structures fashioned in exile by the Judean community are totally ignored by the imperial return policy. Yet both these and the construction agenda may to some extent explain the delay in temple construction and the need for out-sourced labor (Ezra 3:5). As James M. Trotter reminds us, the

¹⁵⁵ Amelie Kuhrt, "The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25 (1983): 91-94.

¹⁵⁶ Trotter, "Was the Second Jerusalem," 15-16.

¹⁵⁷ James D. Purvis, "Exile and Return: From the Babylonian Destruction to the Reconstruction of the Jewish State," in *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988), 158-59. Purvis states that some scholars argue that the synagogue as a substitute for the temple came into being at this time. But there is no specific evidence for this, and the question has been debated with no clear resolution.

return should certainly not be viewed as an expression of humanitarian concern for the needs of the local populace.¹⁵⁸ Reinstating the Temple in *Yehud* was simply an expression of an imperial policy that functioned to create and maintain stability in colonial holdings by connecting imperial rule with the local gods.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, with a rebuilt temple, mandatory pilgrimages would have been reinstated (Duet 16:16) providing the local and imperial economy with an effective money-making industry (cf. Ez 4:13).¹⁶⁰ Likewise, according to Jon L. Berquist, the reconstructed Temple in Jerusalem provided a variety of other rituals that not only supported the worship of Yahweh but also the obedience to the Persian empire. The common recognition of Persian sponsorship would offer such opportunities, even if there was little liturgical emphasis on imperial concerns.¹⁶¹ Therefore, the Judean exiles were given a return option that was primarily formulated by the empire and for the empire. Underneath its benevolent façade, Cyrus' edict underscored his dominance and highlighted the reality of empire in the entire return process.

The decision to return, therefore, involved submitting to the return policy defined by the empire. In returning under these set conditions, the Judean community in effect underscored their allegiance to the empire's mission. In Ezra

¹⁵⁸ Trotter, "Was the Second Jerusalem," 15-19.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Martin Goodman, "The pilgrimage economy of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period," in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: Continuum, 1999), 69-76.

¹⁶¹ Jon L. Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow: A Social and Historical Approach* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1995), 142.

4:1-3, this allegiance affects their treatment by previously established communities in the province:

When the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the LORD, the God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of families and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of King Esarhaddon of Assyria who brought us here." But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of families in Israel said to them, "You shall have no part with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus of Persia has commanded us."

It is clear from this passage that the return policy was one that not only benefited the empire, but also did not involve the collaboration of regional residents of similar faith. Under the empire's return policy, the task of constructing the temple was handed over to mostly Jewish elite. It appears that once back in their homeland, the returned exiles then began to function as instruments of imperial control themselves, reenacting their own victimized history by marginalizing regional residents from the rebuilding process, while they themselves become instruments of imperial expansion and control. In Berquist's words:

Yehud was thus a new political entity, created as a result of Persian expansion and administered in cooperation with Persia for the purpose of supporting Persia's needs for income and border security . . . The immigration of a new elite class provided a group with strong cultural ties to Babylonia and Persia, along with some ethnic, cultural, and religious connections to the long-standing traditions of the Davidic dynasty and its temple.

Only the returned exiles with advanced education and valuable technical skills were crucial to sustaining the growth of the empire.

In the second wave of returning exiles, the demand for choice human capital remained a priority for the Persian empire. In an official letter from Artaxerxes I to Ezra, the second wave of returnees is represented in terms of imperial policy:

This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to the priest Ezra, the scribe, a scholar of the text of the commandments of the LORD and his statutes for Israel: "Artaxerxes, king of kings, to the priest Ezra, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven: Peace. And now I decree that any of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom who freely offers to go to Jerusalem may go with you. (Ez 7:11-13)

Similar to the first return, details of this return experience have to be deciphered within the parameters of a royal letter. The formalities and the language of this correspondence reveal the empire's control over the return process. Among those given the right to return are the priests and Levites. In sending to *Yehud* priests with no ethnic ties, the Persians could maintain their political control at arm's length, while at the same time allowing *Yehud* to develop a strong sense of self-identity, rooted in its own locally controlled institutions, the temple and its priesthood.¹⁶² Clearly, the purpose of this return is to continue a strong imperial interest in the Temple.

Similar to Cyrus's return policy, Artaxerxes offers a return that meets a specific imperial agenda:

For you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God, which is in your hand, and also to convey the silver and gold that the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem,

¹⁶² Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow*, 155.

Ezra's commission to establish a new imperial legal apparatus is suggestive of a transformation in the imperial administration of law within the province. Rather than superimpose a rigid set of imperial laws over a subject territory, the imperial system sought to work within the legal structures already in place.¹⁶³ Within the confines of the Persian imperial structure, the law of the Judean exile maintained social order and governed the Judean exiles by their own distinctive legal code.¹⁶⁴ In Ezra's time, the "silver and gold" represented the contributions from the imperial court, showing an official financial concern with the enhancement of worship.¹⁶⁵ Smith-Christopher reminds us that "rewards given to those dependent on the graces of the dominator must not blind us to the negative realities of the oppression that such relationships are built upon."¹⁶⁶ Apart from establishing a rule of law that was reflective of the returning exiles, the empire's return policy also sought sound political leadership. The leaders were instructed to:

appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River who know the laws of your God; and you shall teach those who do not know them. All who will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly

¹⁶³ Kenneth G. Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), 234.

¹⁶⁴ Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow*, 138.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁶⁶ Daniel Smith-Christopher, "Resistance in a 'Culture of Permission': Sociological Readings of the Correspondence with Persian Authorities in Ezra 1-7," in *Truth's Bright Embrace: Essays and Poems in Honor of Arthur O. Roberts*, ed. Arthur O Roberts, Paul N Anderson, and Howard R Macy (Newberg, OR. : George Fox University Press 1996), 24.

executed on them, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of their goods or for imprisonment."

The appointment of various legal officials is a way of imposing the imperial legal order, represented by the law of God that Ezra has with him.¹⁶⁷ Persia developed an administrative apparatus with a certain ideology, and that ideology produced a social construction of a new reality, which was Yehud as a Persian colony. The ideological construction of a new political organization produced an objectified understanding of the world and of *Yehud* as a Persian colony.¹⁶⁸ By equating the law of God with the law of the emperor, Ezra encouraged allegiance to Persia.¹⁶⁹ Artaxerxes I desired a much stronger presence for the Persian empire in this frontier colony, and religion proved to be one means toward this end.

The book of Ezra shows how regional residents of *Yehud* operated within and under the infrastructure of the political institution established by the empire.¹⁷⁰ This Persian empire was inherently expansionist and conducted its expansion through a colonialism backed by a centralized control force. Its specific goals include neutralizing any other potentially viable force controlling resources and labor

¹⁶⁷ Høglund, *Achaemenid Imperial*, 230.

¹⁶⁸ Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow*, 141.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁷⁰ Jeremiah Cataldo, "Persian Policy and the Yehud Community During Nehemiah," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28 (2003), 251; *See also* Robert D. Miller II, "Popular, Ideological, and Textual Dimensions of Postexilic Judean Culture," *Estudios Biblicos* 60 (2002): 342.

beyond its own borders, and increasing exploitation of client states.¹⁷¹ It is within this context of Persian empire that Ezra point outs in his public prayer that the Jewish people were “slaves in our own land” under the Persians (Neh 9:36-37).¹⁷²

The Socio-Historical Context of the Mexican-U.S. Migration

Before the Mexico/U.S. border was established, Mexican households traversed the vast Southwest regions of Baja California-South California, Chihuahua-New Mexico-Texas, and Sonora-Arizona.¹⁷³ The shift from being travelers to migrants, however, did not occur until 1848, and came as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which ended the Mexican-American War. The signing of this treaty not only ended U.S. occupation, but it also stipulated the surrender of half of Mexico’s territory, which consisted of the present-day states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, along with parts of Colorado, Nevada, and Utah, for a payment of \$18.3 million.¹⁷⁴ With this captured land came the emergence of a new

¹⁷¹ Berquist, *Judaism in Persia’s Shadow*, 141.

¹⁷² Smith-Christopher, “Resistance in a ‘Culture of Permission,’” 33.

¹⁷³ Chew-Sanchez. “Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora,” 2.

¹⁷⁴ Douglas S. Massey, Jorge Durand, and Nolan J. Malone, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors: Mexican Immigration in an Era of Economics Integration* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), 24; In reference to U.S. history, Luis D. León’s words are fitting here, “The flow of U.S. history does not follow an east-west axis exclusively but adheres also to a south-north axis—a fact that is repeatedly overlooked in historical reconstructions of American religion.” “Metaphor and

international boundary that in the end would become the most defining symbol in the Mexican immigration experience. According to article 5 of the treaty, this new U.S.-Mexican boundary was to run from the Gulf of Mexico westward along the Rio Grande to a point just above El Paso del Norte, Chihuahua, and thence in a somewhat irregular line to the Pacific just below San Diego, California.¹⁷⁵ This U.S. colonial conquest not only defined a nation but also ushered in the age of Mexican-U.S. migration, which consisted of four distinct periods: the first “Great Migration” (1900s-1920s), the “*Bracero* Era” (1942-1964), the so-called “*Los Mojados*” period (1950s), and the “Second Great Migration” (1970s-present).¹⁷⁶

First Wave: Great Migration (1900s-1920s)

The first phase of Mexican migration to the United States began in the 1880s with the completion of major railroad lines into the Southwest, including the Mexican Central and lesser lines linking the interior of Mexico to the border.¹⁷⁷

Place: The U.S.-Mexico Border as Center and Periphery in the Interpretation of Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67 (1999): 543.

¹⁷⁵ Manuel Caballos-Ramírez and Oscar J. Martínez, “Conflict and Accommodation on the U.S.Mexican Border, 1848-1911,” in *Myths, Misdeeds, and Misunderstandings: The Roots of Conflict in U.S.-Mexican Relations*, eds. Jaime E. Rodríguez O. and Kathryn Vincent (Wilmington: DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1997).136-37.

¹⁷⁶ Albert Camarillo, “*Alambrista* and the Historical Context of Mexican Immigration to the United States in the Twentieth Century,” in *Alambrista an The U.S.-Mexico Border: Film, Music, and Stories of Undocumented Immigrants*, eds. Nicholas J. Cull and David Carrasco (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 15.

With the spread of the railroads came an increase in the economic development of the American Southwest. The ambitious destination points of U.S. railroads connected its fertile valleys and natural resources to lucrative markets and growing industries back east. The U.S. railroad expansion represented the peaceful U.S. conquest in the early 1880s and by 1910 had constructed 15,000 miles of roads, an investment totaling \$500,000,000.¹⁷⁸

The growth of U.S. railroads also had an adverse effect on the nation's economics. With relatively rapid economic growth, there arose serious labor shortages in key sectors of the western economy, particularly in railroads, mining, agriculture, and construction. Desperate for labor, U.S. employers turned to private labor contractors, who employed a variety of coercive measures to recruit Mexican laborers and deliver them to jobs in the U.S.¹⁷⁹ The coercive policies they employed became known collectively as *el enganche*, which translates literally as "the hook" but might be translated more politely as "indentured." The people who employed these techniques were called *engachadores*.¹⁸⁰ Douglas Massey sets the context well:

¹⁷⁷ Mario T. García, "Mexican Immigration in U.S.-Mexican History: Myths and Reality," in *Myths, Misdeeds, and Misunderstandings: The Roots of Conflict in U.S.-Mexican Relations*, eds. Jaime E. Rodriguez O. and Kathryn Vincent (Wilmington: DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1997).202.

¹⁷⁸ Gilbert G. Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor?: Mexican Labor Migration to the United States* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), 20.

¹⁷⁹ Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 27.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

The *enganchadores* typically offered to advance naïve peasants whatever money they needed to travel northward and get a U.S. job. The loan, plus interest, would then be deducted from their wages upon arrival. Once in the United States, however, recruits usually discovered that wages were lower than promised, working conditions worse than expected, and interest rates higher than anticipated.¹⁸¹

The dire economic and political conditions existing in Mexico and the job opportunities offered in an expanding U.S. economy initiated the first great movement of Mexican migrants into the United States.¹⁸² Fulfilling the cheap labor needs of a growing U.S. economy, however, represented only the beginning stages of this first great wave of Mexican migration to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century.

During president's Porfirio Díaz's regime (1880-1919), a new economic philosophy in Mexico also gave impetus to the early Mexican-U.S. migration phenomenon. With the backing of significant U.S. corporations and investors, Díaz implemented various liberal economic policies in developing an "antiquated" Mexican economy. Under these policies, Díaz offered generous incentives to investors in the U.S., Britain, and France to finance the development of railroads, mining, petroleum, and manufacturing.¹⁸³ By 1900 dominant U.S. monopolistic capitalists such as J.P. Morgan, Daniel Guggenheim, J.D. Rockefeller, and Jay

¹⁸¹ Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 28.

¹⁸² Maria Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound: The Mexican Immigrant Experience in Ballad and Song* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), xx.

¹⁸³ Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 29.

Gould, had come to control the Mexican economy, dominating oil, mining, railroads, and vast sections of agriculture.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, the traditional system of privatized lands was replaced by the consolidation of land and the mechanization of farming, which transformed Mexico from an agrarian to an industrial footing. Though these policies did enjoy some success in turning around the Mexican economy, they also contributed significantly to hundreds of displaced Mexican families. Through privatization, enclosure, and land consolidation, more than 95 percent of rural households had become landless by 1910.¹⁸⁵ This led into widespread disapproval of Diaz's liberal economics that ignited an all-out civil war in Mexico.

During the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), many Mexican nationals crossed the border into the United States in order to take refuge from the pervasive violence and bloodshed.¹⁸⁶ A great number of middle-class families as well as working-class *campesinos* (farm workers) migrated to the U.S. in search of more peaceful conditions in which to raise their children and commence a new life.¹⁸⁷ Perhaps as

¹⁸⁴ Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor?*, 20.

¹⁸⁵ Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 29.

¹⁸⁶ María Herrera-Sobek, "Toward the Promised Land: *La frontera* as Myth and Reality in Ballad and Song," *Aztlán* 21 (1996): 238.

¹⁸⁷ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, xx.

many as 1.5 million people—about a tenth of the entire population of Mexico—crossed the border into the U.S.¹⁸⁸

Though the Mexican Revolution was instrumental in causing the first great wave of Mexican migration to the U.S., the demand for cheap Mexican labor was particularly great when the U.S. became embroiled in World War I in 1917. As a result of WW I, the United States experienced enormous expansion in its major industries. Yet, with the war, there also came a tightening labor market. Industrialists in Chicago, Kansas City, Los Angeles, and other cities relied even more on the *enganchadores*.¹⁸⁹ Yet, in contrast to the previous *enganchador* movement, the U.S. government assumed a direct role in labor recruitment by creating its own worker recruitment program.¹⁹⁰ Under the auspices of the first *bracero* program, Mexican laborers were readily available to meet the demand, arriving in large numbers.¹⁹¹ Research indicates that by the 1920s Mexicans comprised 85 percent of the Southwest's railroad track labor, 50 percent of cotton pickers, and 75 percent of beet, vegetable, and fruit labor. In the 1920s, a critic of

¹⁸⁸ Camarillo, “*Alambrista* and the Historical Context of Mexican Immigration,” 16.

¹⁸⁹ Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 28.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁹¹ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, xx.

Mexican migrant labor noted that the Mexican “is probably the most docile and gullible of all the immigrants arriving that the United States has ever seen.”¹⁹²

After World War I, a large Mexican labor force in the U.S. coupled with postwar economic recession gave way to a growing anti-Mexican sentiment.¹⁹³ With the crash of the stock market in October 1929, the opposition of U.S. citizens toward Mexican migrant laborers intensified into a deep and widespread hostility.¹⁹⁴ The deepening of the depression in the early 1930s reversed the course of a once a northward flow of Mexican migrants into the U.S. to a southward flow into Mexico. The rising anti-Mexican migrant sentiment had increased to such an extent that large numbers of Mexican nationals and U.S. citizens of Mexican descent were repatriated and deported to Mexico without major public protest.¹⁹⁵ Between half a million and 750,000 Mexican immigrants and their American-born children left the United States during the 1930s.¹⁹⁶ These deportations had been sponsored largely by local business and civic groups with little intervention by the U.S. government. Mexico not only had viewed this as an act of discrimination on the part of the United States but had also been upset that thousands of Mexicans

¹⁹² García, “Mexican Immigration in U.S.-Mexican History,” 208.

¹⁹³ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, xx.

¹⁹⁴ Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 33.

¹⁹⁵ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, xx.

¹⁹⁶ García, “Mexican Immigration in U.S.-Mexican History,” 203.

had been unceremoniously dumped on its northern frontier, causing untold economic hardships for many Mexican migrant households.¹⁹⁷

Some of the initial forces instigating the first wave of Mexican-U.S. migration were most likely the market failures of the Porfirian economy and later on the Mexican Revolution. Nevertheless, Mexican-U.S. migration probably would not have begun had it not been for an expanding U.S. economy. Having expanded into the Southwest, the demand for labor became so intense that U.S. employers, and later the federal government itself, turned to private firms to undertake direct recruitment of Mexican labor.¹⁹⁸ Between 1900 and 1930, the Mexican population in the Southwest grew from an estimated 375,000 to 1,160,000; the majority of whom had been born in Mexico.¹⁹⁹

Second Wave: *Bracero* Era (1942-1964),

In December 1941, the United States had entered World War II, creating new demands for Mexican migrant labor to harvest the nation's agricultural fields and to work in the country's railroads. As a result, on August 4, 1942, a treaty was signed by Mexico and the United States to temporarily import Mexican workers under what came to be known as the *Bracero* Program (derived from the Spanish word

¹⁹⁷ Juan Ramon García, *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Workers Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 21.

¹⁹⁸ Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 31.

¹⁹⁹ Ronald Takaki, *A Larger Memory: A History of Our Diversity with Voices* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1998), 240.

brazo, or arm, the word can be translated loosely as “farmhand”).²⁰⁰ This new “guest worker” program was to be a joint operation that consisted of the U.S. Departments of State, Labor, and Justice. The primary enforcers of the program would be the Justice’s key agency the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), which was given authority to regulate entries and departures and enforce the terms of temporary visa.²⁰¹ Though viewed as a wartime measure, the *Bracero* Program transported nearly a half-million men to labor in the production of the United States’ field crops, fruits, and vegetables—the most arduous and least compensated work available in the nation.²⁰²

The response of Mexican laborers to the demands of the U.S. labor market surpassed government expectations. Over the twenty-two years it operated, the program brought nearly five million workers to the United States for periods usually from three to six months.²⁰³ The millions of Mexican laborers who could not obtain legal contracts even began crossing the border “illegally” in order to meet the demands of U.S. farmers.²⁰⁴ During this post-revolution and post-

²⁰⁰ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, xxi.

²⁰¹ Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 35.

²⁰² Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor?*, 20.

²⁰³ Camarillo, “*Alambrista* and the Historical Context of Mexican Immigration,” 23.

²⁰⁴ Patricia Zamundio, “Mexico: Mexican International Migration,” in *Migration and Immigration: A Global View*, eds. Maura I. Toro-Morn and Marixsa Alicea (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 132. Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, xxi.

depression period the demand for employment enticed many more Mexicans who could not be accommodated through the *Bracero* Program to enter the United States illegally. By the early 1950s a large migration of undocumented workers was underway, adding a new element to traditional Mexican-U.S. migration.²⁰⁵ In 1964, at the request of the American government, the *Bracero* Program was finally terminated.²⁰⁶ Designed for the benefit of U.S. agricultural corporations, this program deeply affected the hundreds of thousands of men, who, in legal terms, were indentured laborers, recruited and processed by the U.S. government.²⁰⁷

Third Wave: *Los Mojados* Period (1950s),

During the 1950s employers in the United States continued recruiting Mexican workers and opportunities to become a legal citizens further increased the undocumented influx. By 1953, the flow of undocumented Mexican labor into the Southwest was such that the United States felt compelled to institute Operation Wetback (*mojado*) to curtail the flow.²⁰⁸ During this time, the term *wetback* arose to describe the exceedingly high number of Mexican migrants who crossed the Rio Grande by swimming it, leaving them drenching wet when they reached the banks

²⁰⁵ Camarillo, “*Alambrista* and the Historical Context of Mexican Immigration,” 24.

²⁰⁶ Maria Herrera-Sobek, “Corridos and Canciones of Mica, Migra, and Coyotes: A Commentary on Undocumented Immigration,” in *Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life*, ed. Stephen Stern and John Allan Cicala (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1991), 88.

²⁰⁷ Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor?*, 79.

²⁰⁸ Zamudio, “Mexico: Mexican International Migration,” 133.

on the U.S. side. This disparaging term vividly shows the hostility and low regard, which the general U.S. population had for the many Mexican migrant workers who had labored hard and long, contributing to the economic growth of the United States.²⁰⁹

In 1954, Operation Wetback resulted in INS raids and sweeps of millions of undocumented Mexican migrants, and was the first deportation program in the United States.²¹⁰ In cooperation with state and local authorities, the INS led the way in militarizing the border and organizing a mass roundup and repatriation of undocumented Mexican migrants. At one point the INS was raiding agricultural fields in the southwestern United States, arresting undocumented workers, transporting them back to the border, and deporting them into the waiting arms of officials from the U.S. Department of Labor, who promptly processed them as *braceros* and retransported them back to the very fields where they had been first arrested.²¹¹ Juan Ramos García gives a telling statement about the deportation process:

As they boarded the buses and as they rode along, apprehended “illegals” saw bilingual billboards and signs bearing the following inscription: “NOTICE: The United States Needs Legal Farm Workers! The Mayor of Your Town Can Arrange for Your Contracting. WARNING: The Era of the Wetback and the Wire

²⁰⁹ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, xxi.

²¹⁰ Camarillo, “*Alambrista* and the Historical Context of Mexican Immigration,” 25.

²¹¹ Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 37.

Cutter Has Ended! From This Day Forward Any Person Found in the United States Illegally Will be Punished by Imprisonment.²¹²

This two-pronged strategy was a resounding success for the INS. The expansion of *bracero* migration satisfied growers, while the militarization of border and the massive number of apprehensions reassured voters and assuaged their nativist fears, creating the widespread perception that the border was under control.²¹³

Fourth Wave: Second Great Migration (1970s-present)

Beginning in 1968, the flow of Mexican migrants in the U.S. was subject to a cap of 120,000, forcing them, for the first time, to compete for limited supply of visas with immigrants from other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.²¹⁴ By the 1970s the United States was experiencing high inflation, rising unemployment, and sagging wages, which made Mexican-U.S. migration a volatile political issue. Widespread public hysteria had emerged from the unproven supposition that undocumented Mexican migrants, besides breaking the law through their illegal entry into the U.S., siphoned away precious resources from native-born Americans.²¹⁵ In 1977, legal Mexican migration immediately fell by 40 percent, reaching just 45,000, which was the lowest level since the end of the *Bracero* program in 1964. By 1978, Mexican access to visas was further limited by

²¹² García, *Operation Wetback*, 184.

²¹³ Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 37.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

²¹⁵ García, “Mexican Immigration in U.S.-Mexican History,” 207.

amendments that eliminated the separate hemispheric ceilings and created a single 290,000 worldwide cap, which was subsequently reduced to 270,000 in 1980.²¹⁶

During the first half of the 1980s a variety of bills was introduced to tighten border enforcement. In late 1986, both houses of Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which was signed into law by President Reagan and took effect on January 1, 1987, ushering in a new era of Mexico-U.S. migration.²¹⁷ Major points of this IRCA included an immediate 50 percent increase in INS enforcement budget; imposed sanctions against employers who knowingly hired undocumented migrants; and authorized amnesty for long-term undocumented residents.²¹⁸ This bill transformed social, economic, and political conditions on both sides of the border.²¹⁹

Rather than slowing down the rate of undocumented entry, IRCA seems only to have succeeded in transforming a seasonal flow of temporary workers into a more permanent population of settled legal immigrants. The IRCA unleashed an intense process of family reunification involving the parents, spouses, children, and siblings of recently legalized immigrants. It substantially feminized and urbanized

²¹⁶ Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 43.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

²¹⁸ Massey, *Beyond Smoke and Mirrors*, 43.

²¹⁹ Jorge Durand, Douglas S. Massey, and Emilio A. Prado, "The New Era of Mexican Migration to the United States," *The Journal of American History* (1999): 522.

the population of migrants.²²⁰ At the same time, the law made the undocumented immigrant's economic situation less secure.²²¹ It encouraged wage discrimination against undocumented migrants, and pushed employers toward labor subcontracting and outsourcing. In essence this legislation imposed a tax on the hiring of undocumented workers, which employers extracted from the workers themselves and of course resulted in lower wages. As a result, after 1986 Mexican migrants found themselves working longer hours for lower pay.²²²

In the post-IRCA period, there has been climate of growing rejection of undocumented Mexican immigrant in the United States. The most notorious was California's Proposition 179, which in 1994 sought to curtail government services to both documented and undocumented migrants.²²³ Under this proposition, social service providers and educators served as instruments of surveillance whose duties would include informing on undocumented immigrants to the INS.²²⁴ In California during this time, there was a trend toward more openly racist and xenophobic anti-Mexican demonstrations. In this state, the economic recession that had afflicted the

²²⁰ Prado, "The New Era of Mexican Migration," 522.

²²¹ Zamundio, "Mexico: Mexican International Migration," 135.

²²² Douglas S. Massey, "The American Side of the Bargain," in *Reinventing the Melting Pot: The New Immigrants and What it Means to be American*, ed. Tamar Jacoby (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 120.

²²³ Remedios Gómez Amau, "Changes in Mexican and United States Migration Policy: A New Era of Serious Dialogue?" *American Studies International* 37 (1999): 48.

²²⁴ Leo R. Chavez, *Covering Immigration: Popular Images and the Politics of the Nation* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 246.

U.S. had become especially intense. In 1994, the U.S. government responded to the Mexican migrant expansion with a massive border security effort called Operation Gatekeeper. This major offensive in deterring Mexican migrants involved building a steel fence between San Diego and Tijuana from the ocean inland about 14 miles.²²⁵ The fence embodies, in Jorge Bustamante's words, "the symbolism that identifies Mexicans as a menace, a danger, an enemy."²²⁶ In other words, it represents the ultimate disparaging symbol of enmity against the Mexican people.

In summary, for decades the United States has demonstrated an insatiable appetite for Mexican labor, though this has decreased in times of high U.S. unemployment, as during the economic crises of 1907, 1921, 1929-1934, 1954, 1974, 1981, and 1992. Nevertheless, even in times of crisis, the demand for cheap labor has never fallen to zero.²²⁷ Rather than viewing Mexican migration as a classic supply-and-demand "push-pull" affair or as a newer version of push-pull, which holds that migration is "self-perpetuating" based on "social networks that sustain it," migration here is explained through acknowledging the critical impact

²²⁵ Jorge A. Bustamante, "Undocumented Migration from Mexico to the United States: A Legal or Labor Issue?" in *Myths, Misdeeds, and Misunderstandings: The Roots of Conflict in U.S.-Mexican Relations*, eds. Jaime E. Rodriguez O. and Kathryn Vincent (Wilmington: DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1997), 234.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Bustamante, "Undocumented Migration," 215.

effected by U.S. imperialism upon the demography and social organization of the Mexican nation.²²⁸

The Role of the U.S. Global Economic Empire in Instigating Mexican Migration

Contemporary Mexican immigration to the U.S. is different in nature since it has been generated largely by the needs of the U.S. industrial expansion, and by poverty in Mexico. Mexican immigrants are not only from border areas; in fact the main contributors to the migration to the U.S. are the central states of Mexico (Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guanajuato). Nonetheless, overall Mexican immigration to the United States is one of the largest population movements in history.²²⁹ Many will agree that the United States is the world's premier capitalist power and is always presented as an example of the strength of capitalism.²³⁰ Among the critics of U.S. global economic superiority, however, the term "empire" has also entered the discussion. James Kurth, a political scientist, asserts that there is only one empire--the global empire of the United States--a state that is neither national nor multinational in the traditional sense, but which is more accurately described as

²²⁸ Gonzalez, *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor?*, 4.

²²⁹ Chew-Sanchez, "Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora," 2.

²³⁰ Michael D. Yates, *Naming the System: Inequality and Work in the Global Economy*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003), 77.

multicultural and transnational.²³¹ For some political analysts, “empire” refers only to direct military rule over an extensive conquered territory, a rule that is financed through plundered resources, heavy taxes, and coercive tribute.

This is certainly the case with the Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires, which conquered territory through the coercive power of the imperial system’s superior military resources.²³² So, in an age in which nationalism and nuclear weapons impose constraints on direct territorial conquest and annexation, is the term “empire” in fact accurately applied to the United States? According to Ivan Eland, however, the traditional model of empire is too restricted.²³³ In other words, empire today emphasizes a political dimension to central authority’s control over the periphery and does not necessarily require the central authority to conquer and occupy a country to exercise imperial authority over it.²³⁴ It is clear that the U.S. represents an economic, political, and military power that is felt globally. Some would argue that the U.S. global influence of the U.S. has limited the force of international law and shrunk the multilateral action and democratic self-governance

²³¹ Kurth, “Migration and the Dynamic of Empire,” 5.

²³² Høglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration*, 167.

²³³ Ivan Eland, *The Empire Has No Clothes: U.S. Foreign Policy Exposed* (Oakland, CA: The Independent Institute, 2004), 21.

²³⁴ Eland, *The Empire Has No Clothes*, 22.

in an increasingly interdependent world.²³⁵ Mexican immigration is connected in a variety of ways to this larger complex of the U.S. empire; it's full shape cannot be seen unless one reconstructs the web of social forces at work in the production of the Mexican immigration experience. By focusing narrowly on immigrants and on the immigration process itself, U.S. policymakers have ignored the broader international forces, many of them generated by the U.S., that have helped give rise to migration flows. The emergence of a global economy and the central military, political, and economic role played by the United States in this process contributed both to the creation abroad of pools of potential migrants and to the formation of linkages between industrialized and developing countries that subsequently were to serve as bridges for international migration. The transformation of the occupational and income structure of the U.S. -is in large part a result of the globalization of production has expanded the supply of low-wage jobs-²³⁶ The establishment of political, military, and economic linkages with the United States seems to have been instrumental in creating conditions that allowed the emergence of large-scale emigration--a common pattern of expanding U.S. political and economic involvement with emigrant-sending countries.²³⁷ It is within this context of U.S. global dominance that I situate the Mexican immigration experience, and suggest

²³⁵ Jan Fichtner, "Empire?" Global Policy Forum, <http://www.globalpolicy.org/empire/empireindex.htm> (accessed September 1, 2005).

²³⁶ Sassen, *Globalization and Its Discontents*, 34.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

the parallel to the biblical experiences of empire. In Kurth's words, "there is a causal connection between empire and immigration, and the two are now coming together as a dynamic duo to utterly transform our world."²³⁸

A central feature of the U.S. empire is the globalization process that it has so vigorously promoted.²³⁹ The expansion of the U.S. global economy has had serious consequences for immigration along the 2000-mile border between Mexico and the United States, which is the longest point of contact in the world between a developed and a developing country.²⁴⁰ Peter Andreas, an expert on U.S.- Latin American relations, states that in recent years the U.S. Border Patrol has apprehended about one million people per year attempting to enter the United States from Mexico.²⁴¹ Yet despite all these arrests the Mexican immigrant population in thirty years has grown from less than 800,000 in 1970 to nearly 8 million in 2000.²⁴² Data from the 2000 census verifies that Mexico became the largest sending country the 1990s. In 1990, immigrants from Mexico accounted for 22 percent of the total foreign-born population. By the year 2000, Mexico alone accounted for 43 percent of the growth in the foreign-born population between

²³⁸ Kurth, "Migration and the Dynamic of Empire," 6.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Peter Andreas, "The Making of Amerexico: (Mis)Handling Illegal Immigration," *World Policy Journal* 11 (1994): 45.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 45.

²⁴² Steven A. Camarota, *Immigration From Mexico: Assessing the Impact on the United States* (Washington, DC: Center for Immigration Studies, 2001), 5.

1990 and 2000.²⁴³ The reason for this increase is the idea that there is a causal connection between an aggressive U.S. global economic empire and immigration.²⁴⁴ Robert A. Isaak, a critic of globalization, asserts that globalization encourages the well-positioned to use tools of economics and politics to exploit market opportunities, boost technological productivity, and maximize short-term material interests in the extreme.²⁴⁵ The result is a rapid increase in inequality between the affluent and the poor.²⁴⁶ Within the context of the U.S. global economic system, Isaak speaks of “the Anglo-American capitalism.” It is this economic structure that became a threat to the non-Anglo-American world not merely as a money culture but as an insatiable, technological innovation machine that seeks to convert all world markets to its way of life.²⁴⁷ This imperial economic structure forces U.S. capitalists to look beyond their own national boundaries to gain access to new and cheap raw materials and workers.²⁴⁸

²⁴³ Steven A. Camarota and Nora McArdle, “Where Immigrants Live: An Examination of State Residency of the Foreign Born by Country of Origin in 1990 and 2000,” *Backgrounder* (Sept 2003): 1.

²⁴⁴ Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (New York: Viking, 2000), 1-20.

²⁴⁵ Isaak, *The Globalization Gap*, 4.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.* Using the American standard as a point of departure, Isaak points out that by 2002, fully 227 of the richest 500 billionaires in the world were American citizens.

²⁴⁷ Isaak, *The Globalization Gap* 13.

Mexico's participation in this greatly expanding economy began in the early 1960s with the U.S. supported border industrialization program. As a result, U.S. manufacturers created numerous *maquiladoras* (assembly plants) along the northern border of Mexico. In these plants, the foreign transnational corporations pay below subsistence wages to workers (mainly women) who live in shacks and in degraded environments of polluted water, waste dumps, and poisonous air.²⁴⁹ Rather than deterring immigration, such business practices have encouraged migration from the interior of Mexico to the border zone, which in turn has led to increased immigration into the United States.²⁵⁰ These unhealthy conditions and persistently low wages lead many to low-paying jobs in the United States. The signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 allowed for further massive U.S. investment and control of the Mexican economy.²⁵¹ As part of this new economic reform strategy, a flood of U.S. agricultural products into Mexico is expected to exacerbate the rural unemployment problem, as Mexican peasants will be unable to compete with cheaper U.S. imports.²⁵² We have already seen how NAFTA allowing--even encouraging--cheap U.S. corn to flood the market has denied peasants their livelihoods, namely the ability to live on their

²⁴⁸ Lance Selfa, "U.S. Imperialism: A Century of Slaughter," *International Socialist Review Issues* 7 (Spring 1999): 2.

²⁴⁹ Yates, *Naming the System*, 46.

²⁵⁰ Andreas, "The Making of Amerexico," 47.

²⁵¹ Yates, *Naming the System*, 43.

²⁵² Andreas, "The Making of Amerexico," 47.

farms. These farmers end up migrating to Mexican urban areas or to the United States, where they in turn become a source of cheap labor.²⁵³ According to Saskia Sassen, the large inflows among the new migrant groups has resulted in the rapid expansion of low-wage jobs in the United States and the casualization of the labor market associated with the new growth industries.²⁵⁴ Profits to the capitalist economy from the use of migrant labor depend on the construction of racist and xenophobic ideologies that legitimize the exploitation of their labor.²⁵⁵ As a result of the U.S. form of capitalism, Mexican society has become marked by grotesque inequality and dependence on the U.S. global economy.

This global economy promoted by the U.S. is a major factor attracting Mexicans away from their homeland. The accumulation of capital by the U.S. global economic empire promotes the overall environment that leads Mexicans to move from their familiar world. Such an environment is represented by a group of institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, which the U.S. uses to manage the world economy in such a way as to insure its dominance.²⁵⁶ The result is a country where there are

²⁵³ Yates, *Naming the System*, 46.

²⁵⁴ *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: The New York Press, 1998), 45.

²⁵⁵ Kimberly M. Grimes, *Crossing Borders: Changing Social Identities in Southern Mexico* (Tuscon, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1998), 19.

²⁵⁶ Yates, *Naming the System*, 46.

jobs, higher wages, and greater opportunities.²⁵⁷ But it comes at the expense of massive territorial displacements of people who live in an exploited economic environment. Using Alexander Motyl's classification scheme of empire, Ivan Eland argues that the United States effectively controls the security policies of allies and also has influence on their domestic policies, Such is certainly the case with Mexico and Latin America.²⁵⁸ In the end U.S. global economy—the U.S. empire—is the primary force shaping, promoting, and determining the character and impact of the Mexican immigrant experience.

Conclusion

For both the Judean exilic community and the Mexican immigrant communities, there is a causal connection between empire and massively displaced populations. As represented in the biblical exile and return texts, it was the imperial system that displaced the Judean community and it was the same system that then drew on this community for a cheap labor force. In the Ezra texts on the return of the Judean exiles, one can likewise identify an exploitative element. Both the language and the structure of these texts reflect imperial procedure and control over the return experience and how it enhanced its sociopolitical and socioeconomic goals. It is replete with the rhetoric of empire. The returned exiles function as human capital

²⁵⁷ Dana W. Wilbanks, *Re-Creating America: The Ethics of U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy in a Christian Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 68.

²⁵⁸ Eland, *The Empire Has No Clothes*, 22.

sent to establish imperially motivated objectives, even at the cost of marginalizing the regional residents--embodying imperial forms of oppression. Moreover, the returned exiles embody an imperial personality in that they in turn become the victimizers of those they consider undesirable and hostile. Though a minority, these nonetheless came to control the city where political and economic power were concentrated

Parallel to this biblical context is the Mexican immigration experience and its connections to the U.S. global economic empire. Throughout their histories, relations between Mexico and the United States have been ones of dependence. This dependence has led to an exploitation of Mexican resources and labor. At the heart of the Mexican immigration experience is an Anglo-American cultural and political domination. This coercive system has created the economy along the northern Mexican border, an economy built on low-wage sweat shops. It is these conditions that have forced the dangerous and sometimes illegal journeys of many Mexican immigrants. Until we better understand the powerful political and economic forces that drive these international migration flows and the role of the U.S. in creating them--inducing individuals to migrate. In building a global economy, the US has increased demand for cheap labor and cheap natural resources.²⁵⁹ This has forced countries like Mexico to shift their limited budgets

²⁵⁹ Douglas S. Massey, "The American Side of the Bargain," in *Reinventing the Melting Pot: The New Immigrants and What it Means to be American*, ed. Tamar Jacoby (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 118.

from the agricultural to the industrial sector.²⁶⁰ This has led to higher food prices, which is taxing for most Mexican families trying to manage on low wage incomes. For this reason, many Mexican workers leave the factories and journey north to wash dishes, clean houses, or work in the landscaping businesses.²⁶¹ Driven northward as a source of cheap labor, Mexican immigrants are painfully separated from their homeland and families. Underneath this pain, however, is a growing resentment toward the U.S. global economic empire as the initiating force of the immigration experience.

²⁶⁰ Ufford-Chase, “Crisis on the Mexican Border” 23.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Chapter Four

Exile in Second Isaiah and the Mexican Immigrant Experience

From an optic of diaspora theology, there emerges the reality of empire behind the exile and return experiences. From this same diasporic perspective, we now move to a reading of Second Isaiah that emphasizes the text's rhetorical agenda, which is to forge a consciousness of exile that prompts a desire to return to Zion/Jerusalem.²⁶² Through the medium of poetry, Second Isaiah defines a distinct Judean identity that claims the nation of Israel is a dispersed nation and that its homeland is Zion/Jerusalem not Babylon.²⁶³ I propose to examine this text from the historical-cultural horizon of the community of that day and through the lenses of the chosen patterns of rhetoric in which the prophet has embodied and encoded this message.

²⁶² Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers have indicated that Jerusalem and Zion should be viewed as complementary designations rather than as synonymous expressions. Jerusalem is a somewhat broader term, although it regularly assumes the characteristic of its main component Zion, God's holy mountain. Together, these terms signal the religious and political centrality of the postexilic capital of Judah. "Jerusalem and Zion after the Exile," in *Sha'arei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, ed. Michael Fishbane and Emanuel Tov (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 124.

²⁶³ A diasporic theological perspective "understands the biblical text as an "other" to us, with its own words and visions, allowing it to speak on its own, to unravel its own narrative, and to define its own identity." "Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora," 69.

Essential to understanding Second Isaiah's rhetorical strategy is its social context. From an older critical consensus perspective, the genesis of Second Isaiah 40-55 is to be sought among the Judean exiles in Babylon. Proponents have argued that it is here that an anonymous prophet, or group of prophets, addressed various oracles to the Judean exiles. Part of their reasoning for exilic authorship rests on the idea that the poetry of Second Isaiah exhibits a mastery of rhetorical constructions widely found in Babylonian literature. Furthermore, it also contains repeated references to Babylon (cf. Is 47) which make the exile a likely historical and cultural context.²⁶⁴

The more recently emerging consensus, however, views this older claim on Second Isaiah's beginnings as partially lacking. Though still adhering to the idea of an initial Babylonian context, current scholarship identifies this collection of poems as being re-edited and updated in several successive stages in Jerusalem by a group of returnees from 520 BCE onwards. Indeed, it is plausible that Second Isaiah may have originated in a fairly long and decidedly complex process over several generations in Babylon and then in Jerusalem.²⁶⁵ J. Severino Croatto echoes this in the following:

Consequently the text of Isaiah 40-55, as it presently stands, should not be seen as coming in its entirety from the time of exile- rather a work brought to completion at a later time, given both its use and

²⁶⁴ James Muilenburg, "The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66," *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol 5, ed. G.A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), 387.

²⁶⁵ Charles Conroy, "Reflections on Some Recent Studies of Second Isaiah," in *Palabra, Prodigio, Poesia in Memoriam P. Luis Alonso Schökel, S.J.* ed. Vicente Collado Bertomeu (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2003), 160.

rereading of material from Second Isaiah (the message to the captives in Babylon) and its proposal for a reconstitution of the ideal “Israel” in its own land. There is a proposal that leads in turn to a call for the return of the people from all the corners of the world.²⁶⁶

This view of Second Isaiah’s development tends to better highlight the diasporic elements of exile and return that permeate the text’s message. According to Muilenburg, despite the independence of the various poems and the difference in mood and occasion that may have inspired them, there is a remarkable persistence of major motifs all the way through that bears witness to the fundamental unity of the whole series.²⁶⁷ It can be argued that among these major motifs are exile and return, which play an important role in unifying Second Isaiah. This resonates with Norman Gottwald’s analysis of Second Isaiah in which he states the following:

As a whole it has a cohesive effect owing to the way key terms, concepts, and figures are repeated and variously developed so that reverberations are set off between units and the listener-reader is lured into tracing the cross-referential path ways that these interwoven associations open up.²⁶⁸

Reverberating throughout Second Isaiah are powerful images that center on exile and return. For the initial production of the text of Second Isaiah 40-55 emerges from a diasporic framework of exile and return. And it is the prophet/poet’s task to imbue a despondent Judean community with a message about leaving Babylon and

²⁶⁶ J. Severino Croatto, “Exegesis of Second Isaiah from the Perspective of the Oppressed,” in *Reading from this Place*, vol. 2, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 223.

²⁶⁷ Muilenburg, “The Book of Isaiah,” 385.

²⁶⁸ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 496.

crossing the enormous desert to return to Zion/Jerusalem.²⁶⁹ Throughout this message, exile and return are powerfully represented, exposed, and manipulated to create a transformative vision. It is this diasporic framework of exile and return that fuels the message of Second Isaiah to devote itself to sociopolitical and socioreligious concerns.

In addition to its unifying thematic elements of exile and return, Second Isaiah's poetry also contains a cultic theological language that has been provocatively secularized by its radical application to a present political crisis.²⁷⁰ The writer capitalizes on earlier prophetic speech, but does so with a maximum of cultic genres that saturate the political thrust of the document with powerful religious associations.²⁷¹ Gottwald states:

The overall fabric and tenor of the work has fared poorly at the hands of interpreters insufficiently sensitive to the work as literature and as an adroitly mediated aesthetic expression of the radical new sociohistoric situation opening up in the years leading up to Babylon's fall.²⁷²

Part of Second Isaiah's political thrust involves the abandonment of a particular cultural identity shared by the Judean exilic community. For instance, there is considerable space devoted to discrediting Babylonian religious practices, which is

²⁶⁹ Richard J. Clifford, "Isaiah, Book of (Second Isaiah)," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 3: 498.

²⁷⁰ Norman K. Gottwald, "Social Class and Ideology in Isaiah 40-55: An Eagletonian Reading," *Semeia* 59 (1992): 46.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁷² Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*, 501.

an indication that members of the exilic community became resigned to permanent Babylonian hegemony.²⁷³ It is the Judean exiles' fascination with the religion of the prevailing empire that reflects their inability to appropriate an identity rooted in the beliefs, symbols, and meanings of their ancestral land. It is from this ancestral *ethos* that Second Isaiah aims to recover a distinct cultural identity among the Judean exiles. For instance, many studies of Second Isaiah have recognized Second Isaiah's use of earlier traditions concerning creation (e.g. 40:12-17, 22, 26; 42:5; 44:24; 45:7, 12), Abraham (41:8; 51:2), especially the exodus/conquest and Moses (e.g. 41:17-20; 43:16-17, 20; 48:21; 51:9-10; 52:11-12), and finally David (55:3-5).²⁷⁴ These allusions to Israel's ancestral history appeal to an institutionalized memory shared by the members of the exilic community. This memory not only serves as a counter ideology to the one imposed by the Babylonian empire, but also to politically mobilize the Judean community to return to an ancestrally oriented identity developed in their homeland.

Yet for Second Isaiah, the Judean community needing self-definition would have been not only those who had experienced the actual exilic journey but also the offspring of those exiled. By the mid-540s BCE, the first exiles would have been about fifty-five years prior and post-dated the second exile by more than forty years. Since the average life span of persons in ancient Israel cannot have been

²⁷³ William S. Morrow, "Comfort for Jerusalem: The Second Isaiah as Counselor to Refugees," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 34 (2004):85.

²⁷⁴ Rikk E. Watts, "Echoes from the Past: Israel's Ancient Traditions and the Destiny of the Nations in Isaiah 40-55," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28 (2004): 483.

much more than forty, those able to remember life in pre-exilic Jerusalem or Judah were probably few.²⁷⁵ It is also likely that these exiles produced a sizable offspring (cf. Jer 29:4-7). Therefore, it is this second generation of Judean exiles that would have been naturally susceptible to losing their ancestral identity given their Babylonian context.

Even more serious would have been the adversarial reaction of the Babylonian empire to the appropriation of an identity based on a value system established from a destroyed enemy state (i.e. Judah). Hence, it is a particular cultural identity among the Judean exiles and their descendents that Second Isaiah's rhetorical strategy seeks to defend and infuse. Embarking on such a strategy embodies a subversiveness, which, in turn, lends Second Isaiah to being susceptible to possible accusations of disloyalty on the part of the imperial establishment. In other words, the prophet/poet's rhetorical quest to recover a subversive cultural identity represents an act of resistance. It is a resistance to the imperially imposed identity through the forging of an ancestral awareness among the Judean exiles and their descendents that embodies a diasporic mindset of exile and return. In the end, this rival identity of exile and return undermines the self-definition imposed by the oppressive policies of the Babylonian empire.

The combination of Second Isaiah's major thematic elements of exile and return, and its rhetorical strategy to recover a particular cultural identity points to its overall sociopolitical character. Muilenburg cogently suggested that it is

“precipient of an extremely dynamic period of human history, the period in which the Babylonian empire is in radical decline and the Persian empire is dawning.”²⁷⁶ On this topic Alonso Schökel has claimed that Second Isaiah’s poetry is particularly compact and homogeneous and responds to the historical situation of the exile, anticipating the return to Zion.²⁷⁷ From a broader diasporic perspective, the message of Second Isaiah is driven by issues involving political and social liberation and hence economic liberation as well.²⁷⁸ This broader sociopolitical character of Second Isaiah is uniquely compatible with the overall theoretical orientation of diaspora theology. Through this lens, Second Isaiah is simply text, which like all ‘texts’ is an artistic construction with underlying strategic concerns and goals in the light of its own point of view, its own vision of the world and reality, within a given historical and cultural matrix.²⁷⁹ Therefore, a diasporic theological orientation will naturally highlight Second Isaiah’s overall sociopolitical character for the purpose of giving voice to a broader contemporary social context, especially ones involving exile and return.

Inherent in a diasporic theological orientation is the idea that the understanding of exile and return in Second Isaiah can be enriched when put in dialogue with broader diasporic experiences. This kind of reading dynamic not only

²⁷⁶ Muilenburg, “The Book of Isaiah,” 398.

²⁷⁷ Luis Alonso Schökel, “Isaiah,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1987), 167.

²⁷⁸ Croatto, “Exegesis of Second Isaiah,” 236.

²⁷⁹ Segovia, “Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora,” 69.

serves to inform one's reading of the biblical text, but it also brings acknowledgement to marginalized diasporic experiences. Most important, this reading strategy goes beyond simple parallelism. Ultimately, it represents the location of the oppressed, thus, allowing it to inform and liberate key sociopolitical elements in both the biblical and broader diasporic experience.²⁸⁰

The broader context chosen for this study is the Mexican immigrant experience. Already, we have seen that an analysis of the diasporic elements out of which Second Isaiah emerges leads us to a message that is in accord with the Mexican immigrant experience. Among the Mexican immigrant texts found useful are those represented in the cultural narratives that are embodied in the *corrido* (ballads) with lyrics that describe important aspects of Mexican immigrant experience in the United States. Both the poetry of Second Isaiah and the *corrido* about the Mexican immigrant experience are located within a common thematic and literary spectrum. Martha Idalia Chew-Sanchez defines the *corrido* as follows:

The *corrido* is a narrative song, often danced, composed in Spanish that recounts the historical circumstances surrounding a protagonist whose conduct may serve as a model to a community or whose history embodies the everyday experiences and values of the community.²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ Croatto, "Exegesis of Second Isaiah," 234.

²⁸¹ "Cultural Memory in the Rituals of the Mexican Diaspora in the United States: The Role of the *Corridos* about Immigration Played by Conjuntos Norteños and the Aesthetics of the *Bailes Norteños*," (Paper presented, "The Interpretation and Representation of Latino Cultures: Research and Museums" National Conference, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, November 20-23, 2002), 1.

The *corrido* thus provides an invaluable documentation of the Mexican immigrant experience. Within this broader context of the *corrido*, there lies a rhetorical strategy to cultivate an identity among first and second generation Mexican immigrants that is rooted in the culture and traditions of their homeland.

Within the overall theoretical framework of diaspora theology space is made for an informative reading of the diasporic experiences reflected in both the biblical material and the Mexican immigrant *corrido*. Therefore, as part of this proposed reading of Second Isaiah, this chapter will focus on the theme of exile in Second Isaiah and compare it with the image of exile portrayed in a selection of *corridos* about the Mexican immigrant experience. Moreover, this chapter lays the foundation for a larger discussion in the next chapter involving the theme of return in both Second Isaiah and the Mexican immigrant *corrido*.

Recovering a Vanquishing Identity in Second Isaiah

Years of settlement created a cynicism and a loss of nationalist fervor in the Judean exilic community. The reality of this cultural threat is evident in the prophet/poet's assault on the Babylonian empire from which the exilic community was to be delivered.²⁸² In other words, interwoven in the prophet's message of deliverance is the reality of the empire and its control over the exiles' identity. Mentioning of this reality is seen in Isaiah 43:14 in which Babylon is branded as an

²⁸² Eugene H. Merrill, "Isaiah 40-55 Anti-Babylonian Polemic," *Grace Theological Journal* 8 (1987): 3.

arrogant hegemonic power: “Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: For your sake I will send to Babylon and break down all the bars, and the shouting of the Chaldeans will be turned to lamentation.” Though the prophet sees destruction to be the empire’s ultimate fate, it still remains a ruler over their present reality. Reflected in this verse is also the prophet/poet’s subversive agenda to undermine the empire’s imposed self-definition on the Judean community.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in Isaiah 47. Using the rhetorical devices of personification, the prophet/poet addresses the Babylonian empire as Virgin

Daughter Babylon, בַּת־בָּבֶלֶת, and Daughter of Chaldea, בַּת־כַּשְׁדִּים.

Throughout chapter 47, the prophet/poet exposes the injustices committed by the Babylonian empire toward the Judean exiles, which adds to highlight his subversive agenda. In verse 6, the oppressive empire is described in terms of a heavy yoke: “I was angry with my people, I profaned my heritage; I gave them into your (Babylon) hand, you showed them no mercy; on the aged you made your yoke exceedingly heavy.” Though the prophet/poet upheld the tradition that the initial exile was a sovereign act of God (cf. Jer. 25: 8-11; 27:5-6; Isa 40:1-2), the oppression endured in exile was seen as a cause of the empire.²⁸³ In other words, it is while in the “hands” of the empire, that the Judean exiles live in a state governed by an oppressive regime. This remains the present condition of the exile

²⁸³ Walter Brueggemann, “At the Mercy of Babylon: A Subversive Rereading of the Empire,” in *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel’s Communal Life*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 118.

community, one of intense struggle and demand. This view of the empire continues in verse 8 in which the personified Babylon arrogantly proclaims herself as the only unconquered city (i.e. Zion/Jerusalem)²⁸⁴: “Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, "I am, and there is no one besides me; I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children." As the capital of the empire, female Babylon’s quoted statement reveals a broader sociopolitical reality, which involved the oppressive nature of the Babylonian empire. It is because of this broader reality that the prophet/poet announces a powerful final verdict on the empire, “. . .there is no one to save you.” For the prophet/poet, the oppressive rule of empire will soon end. In response to Second Isaiah’s subversive view of the empire, Brueggemann writes, “the empire is never even close to being ultimate but always lives under the threat of this rhetoric that rejects every imperial complacency, every act of autonomy, every gesture of self-sufficiency.”²⁸⁵ Essential to Second Isaiah’s rhetorical strategy is opposing Babylonian ideology of power, which, we can see from these texts, has penetrated into the Judean exilic consciousness. This threatening reality is captured in Isaiah 49:24 where the exilic community asks “Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued?” Perhaps years of living under an oppressive regime have led to a cynical view of reality. Indeed, the empire and its oppressive rule over the exilic

²⁸⁴ Brueggemann, “At the Mercy of Babylon,” 120.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

community emerge as a focal point in God's message of hope to the exiles, as stated in verses 25-26:

But thus says the LORD, "Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued; for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children. I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine. Then all flesh shall know that I am the LORD your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."

Emanating from these texts is a revealing portrait of the empire that resembles a harsh and brutal ruler. For Second Isaiah, recovering a distinct cultural identity means vilifying the Babylonian empire as an oppressive tyrant.

In undermining the empire's control over the exiles' view of reality, Second Isaiah attacks with words about Babylonian religious practice. Throughout Second Isaiah, there is much to lead us to suspect that the exiles were attracted to the pageantry and color and splendor of the empire's cult. In Isaiah 46:1-13, the prophet/poet alludes to its tutelary god *Marduk* who is the legitimator of the Babylonian empire and its practices of domination.²⁸⁶ As Muilenburg has suggested:

The great processions like those on New Year's Day, the display of the idols, the drama of the cult, the ancient myths, the impressive rituals, and the elaborate pantheon may easily have tempted not a few to abandon the ways of their fathers and to seek the help of such powerful gods as Marduk.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ Croatto, "Exegesis of Second Isaiah," 221.

²⁸⁷ Muilenburg, "The Book of Isaiah," 385.

One can suppose that the Judean exilic community was also exposed to the themes and motives of the great Babylonian myth of the creation, the *Enûma eliš*, which was central to the New Year's celebration. The importance of this myth to the Babylonian identity would have had an enormous ideological impact upon its citizens, especially for an exiled community living in Babylon. This myth shows that *Marduk*, the god of Babylon is absolute Lord of all the gods, even the God of the exiles. In political terms, Babylon is the only recognized empire that has all the power.²⁸⁸ It is within this religious *ethos* that the prophet/poet addresses issues of identity by creating a counter myth involving the community's homeland traditions. Part of the prophets program, therefore, involves a historical memory that refers to an ancestral God and his power over the gods of the empire: "remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me." (Is 46:9) The rhetorical strategy embodies imaginatively the costly project of staying faithful against the tide of the Babylonian hegemony and the subtle attraction of Judean exiles to adopt that kind of hegemonic thinking.²⁸⁹

This historical memory was presumably evoked by Second Isaiah in order to address an apparent trend among the Judean exiles to forsake their cultic heritage for Babylonian deities.²⁹⁰ Proving their attractiveness to the Judean exilic community are the frequent passages that refer to the gods of Babylon and the

²⁸⁸ J. Severino Croatto, "La Propuesta Querigmatica del Segundo Isaias," *Revista Biblica* 54 (1994): 68.

²⁸⁹ Gottwald, "Social Class and Ideology," 48.

²⁹⁰ Merrill, "Isaiah 40-55 Anti-Babylonian Polemic," 4.

making and worship of idol-statues (40:18-20; 41:6-7; 21-24, 26, 28-29; 42:8, 17; 43:9; 44: 7, 9-20; 45: 20-21; 46: 1-2, 5-7; 48:5). Intertwined in these passages is the prophet/poet's assault on Babylonian religious practice. In Isaiah 40: 18-19, for instance, the prophet/poet questions the fundamental essence of Babylonian idols: "To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? An idol? - -A workman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold, and casts for it silver chains." For the prophet/poet, the power of Babylonian idols is seriously put into question. Further assaults on Babylonian religious practice occur in Isaiah 44: 9-10 in which the idols are seen as ephemeral objects: "All who make idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit; their witnesses neither see nor know. And so they will be put to shame. Who would fashion a god or cast an image that can do no good?" Arguably, the rhetorical agenda reflected in these texts is not only to attack imperial idols but also to call the exilic community back to a distinct cultural identity. Given the process of acculturation—which has been quite long already and in all likelihood quite profound as well--the Judean exiles should be leaning toward other gods more effectively than the God of their ancestors. At the same time, the internalization of the gods associated with the oppressive empire is a process that gradually prevents any possibility of a return.²⁹¹ The most telling proof that those who trusted in and worshiped other gods were none other than the exiles is to be found in Isaiah 48:4-5:

Because I know that you are obstinate, and your neck is an iron
sinew and your forehead brass, I declared them to you from of old,

²⁹¹ Croatto, "Exegesis of Second Isaiah," 229.

before they came to pass I announced them to you, lest you should say, 'My idol did them, my graven image and my molten image commanded them.'

To the exiles, the images of the gods of Babylon were imposing, and the image of God commensurately was increasingly cast into doubt by new generations.²⁹²

Nevertheless, these and other allusions to the exiles' adoption of Babylonian religious belief ultimately serve to recover their ancestral religious memory.

A more explicit demonstration of the prophet/poet's rhetorical agenda to recover a distinct cultural identity in the midst of Babylonian religious pressures is in the passages that address the exiles as Jacob/Israel (40: 27; 41: 8, 14, 21, 24; 42: 24; 43: 1, 22, 28; 44: 1,2,5,21,23; 45:4,19; 46:3; 48: 1, 12, 20; 40:5, 6, 26). This is highlighted in Muilenburg's commentary in which he claims that these names give the exiled community its identity and historical reality.²⁹³ The relationship is rooted in the election, the historical event of the exodus from Egypt and in the covenant event concluded on Sinai.²⁹⁴ Croatto claims that the Jacob/Israel titles serve to resuscitate the exiles' historical memory in order to create the thought of liberation.²⁹⁵ It strengthens the exile's self-image as a nation and restoring their confidence in God's guidance-it highlights the exilic community's national renewal

²⁹² José Severino Croatto, "El Déutero-Isaías, profeta de la utopia," *RIBLA* 24 (1997): 36.

²⁹³ "The Book of Isaiah," 453.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 481.

²⁹⁵ Croatto, "El Déutero-Isaías, profeta de la utopia," 38.

through invoking the name of Jacob.²⁹⁶ Exemplifying this is Isaiah 48:1, which reads, “Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and who came forth from the loins of Judah; who swear by the name of the LORD, and confess the God of Israel, but not in truth or right.” (Is 48:1) Hence, the frequent designation of these addressees as Jacob/Israel references a different time and place outside of the confines of the empire. This dual designation alludes to God’s initial covenant with his people and the early formations of a nation (cf. Gen 35). Their connection with a historical memory makes them useful in reorienting a vanquishing Judean identity toward their ancestral homeland. Moreover, by recovering their distinct cultural identity, the prophet prepares the way for them to return to Zion/Jerusalem.

Conveying an Awareness of Exile

In convincing the Judean community to resist a Babylonian identity, Second Isaiah aims to revive an awareness of being a people of exile. In achieving this awareness, Second Isaiah does not choose random images unknown to the Judean exilic community. Rather, the prophet/poet selects concepts that are rooted in the community’s exilic experience. In other words, couched in the prophet/poet’s message of return is a particular symbolic language that is based on the Judean community’s journey experience into exile and everyday life in exile. In order to

²⁹⁶ Polliack, “Deutero-Isaiah’s Typological use of Jacob,” in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, eds. Reventlow Henning and Yair Hoffman (New York : Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 80.

present the exile's prospective return journey as a established historical fact, Second Isaiah makes ample use of the exilic journey experience. Through invoking these scenes of common experiences a strengthened awareness is formed, which is necessary for a future return to occur.

In Second Isaiah, elements that would have been understood by the exilic community as part of the journey into exile are used to describe the exiles' return journey to their homeland. For example, the following elements of the exilic journey would have been present: desert terrain, loss of strength, lack of water, and guided pathways. The correspondence of these elements to a prior exilic journey experience enables the exilic community to conceptualize a future return journey to a homeland.²⁹⁷ Making the prophet/poet's return journey powerful is that he makes use of a cultural knowledge of journey, which has a correspondence to the journey into exile. Thus, for example, in Isaiah 40: 3, the desert is not only an element to reckon with in the return, but an image that has links to the journey into exile: "A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'" Muilenberg indicates that the reference to the wilderness deliberately alludes to the Judean's experience of the desert waste between Babylonia and Palestine.²⁹⁸ Thus any reference to 'wilderness' and 'desert' is understood within the experiential framework of the community's

²⁹⁷ George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 60-61.

²⁹⁸ Muilenburg, "The Book of Isaiah," 426.

journey into exile which is in turn used to forge a perspective of return within a community that has long settled in Babylon.

In conjunction with the journey through the desert is the aspect of lost strength. In Isaiah 40:31, the reference to strength and deliverance--“ . . .but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint”—more immediately alludes to the strength that will be needed for prolonged and difficult travel. Yet, the meaningfulness of strength is derived from not having had strength in the community’s former journey into exile. The passage as a whole develops the theme of one who has tired on the journey, and to whom the belief in God provides extraordinary power and strength.²⁹⁹

Apart from a lack of strength is the issue of water during the journey through the desert. For instance, in Isaiah 43:18-19, water is assured to be abundant in the desert: “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” The demand for water in the desert maintains a close connection with other journey experiences in the exiles’ ancestral traditions (c.f. Ex 17: 3, 6); although, the terror of not having water during the exiles’ journey to Babylon may have been the more immediate point of reference for the Judean community.

²⁹⁹ Polliack, “Deutero-Isaiah’s Typological Use of Jacob,” 80-82.

In describing the return journey, the prophet/poet also uses the motif of guided pathways. In Isaiah 42:16, God will guide the Judean exilic community back home: “I will lead the blind by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground.” Conversely, the road to Babylon represented an unfamiliar pathway for the Judean community. This unfamiliarity most likely gave way to sense of lostness and confusion. The prophet/poet is sensitive to this fear by addressing it in his description of the exilic community’s future return journey. In this new journey, the Judean community is certain to know its way because they will have God as their guide. This divine guidance is certain to see the exilic community through the various dangers encountered along the way, as suggested in Isaiah 43: 2 ”When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.” Brueggemann cogently suggests that Second Isaiah imagines the threat of flood water and fires, realities that jeopardize the returning exiles.³⁰⁰ God, nevertheless, promises to guide the returning exiles through these perils of the pathway. Consequently, the validity of these pathway dangers as genuine elements of the journey images is based on the community’s prior exilic journey experience.

In short, the prophet/poet’s schema— desert terrain, loss of strength, lack of water, and guided pathway-- for describing the exilic community’s return journey

³⁰⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 53.

arises out of a known journey experience of exile. It is this rooted experience of exile that the prophet/poet seeks to evoke an awareness of exile, which, in turn, will inspire a return. According to Brueggemann, the more the Judean exilic community becomes aware of their exilic state, the more Second Isaiah can undermine the community's imperially programmed thinking, which has stifled any hope of return.³⁰¹ In other words, these images harness a powerful point of reference, which is the exilic journey, for the purpose of reorienting the community toward a return journey to Zion/Jerusalem. Through these elements, the Judean community and their descendents give remembrance to a confusing and weakening journey through the harsh elements of the arid desert.

Another facet in conveying an awareness of exile is Second Isaiah's explicit reference to life as an exile in Babylon. The prophet alludes to life in exile as a hostile state of existence, as seen in Isaiah 41:11-12,

Yes, all who are incensed against you shall be ashamed and disgraced; those who strive against you shall be as nothing and shall perish. You shall seek those who contend with you, but you shall not find them; those who war against you shall be as nothing at all.

These passages suggest that the exiles live in a state in which they have to strive against various antagonistic forces. It is a state in which the exiles live in constant anxiety and tension with their Babylonian surroundings. This description of life in exile serves a dual purpose, which is not only to remind the Judean exilic community of their current exilic status but also to inspire the Judean exilic

³⁰¹ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 110-11.

community to return home. This awareness proves important to the exiles that Brueggemann describes as despondent. In his words,

They could not imagine any other status. They accepted Babylonian definitions of reality, not because they were convinced, but because no alternatives were available. These Babylonians' claims seemed as if they would endure to perpetuity (47:7, 8, 10). This exiled community was in despair because it accepted Babylonian definitions of reality and did not know any others were available; that is they were hopeless.³⁰²

Apart from the anxieties of life in Babylonian society, for some life in exile also meant being poor and in need, For instance, Isaiah 41:17 reads:

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive; I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together,

It is suggested that the dominant imagery in these verses appears to envision the exilic community returning home to Jerusalem across the desert.³⁰³ Among those returning are “the poor and needy.” The issue of being poor and needy carries an element that goes beyond the causes of a desert journey. Poverty suggests a condition that had long been underway in Babylon; thus, involving a social and economic forces. Croatto reminds us, for example, that the allusion to water is also more broadly to the social, economic, and political situation of the exiles.³⁰⁴

³⁰² Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 95.

³⁰³ Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 58-59.

³⁰⁴ Croatto, “Exegesis of Second Isaiah,” 235.

Nothing in exile has led to having an abundance of life's vital necessity, water.

These real life images of exile, therefore, arouse contrast in the minds of a despondent exilic community, contrast between Second Isaiah's view of exile and the one projected by the Babylonian empire.

Apart from poverty, the prophet/poet describes the exilic life as a life of imprisonment. In Isaiah 42: 6-7, words like "prisoners", "dungeon", and "darkness" give us a glimpse of life in exile: "I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." Brueggemann argues that in the ancient world imprisonment is primarily an economic function so that the poor are the imprisoned.³⁰⁵ The image of imprisonment is heightened in verse 22 in which the exilic life is depicted as being able to endure plunder and robbery, "But this is a people robbed and plundered, all of them are trapped in holes and hidden in prisons; they have become a prey with no one to rescue, a spoil with no one to say, "Restore!" In this verse, life in exile is portrayed as including being plundered and despoiled, trapped and imprisoned, all actions which are ongoing at the hands of their captors.

In this harsh oppressive environment, the exiles live with a constant fear, as seen in Isaiah 51:13-14: "You fear continually all day long because of the fury of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction. But where is the fury of the oppressor? The oppressed shall speedily be released; they shall not die and go down to the Pit, nor

³⁰⁵ Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 45.

shall they lack bread.” Explicit in these passages is the harsh and brutalizing conditions of daily life in exile. From the “fury of the oppressor” in v.13 to the “hand of your tormentors” in v. 23, life in exile is far from pleasant: “And I will put it into the hand of your tormentors, who have said to you, “Bow down, that we may walk on you”; and you have made your back like the ground and like the street for them to walk on.” Here the prophet testifies to the harsh physical and emotional strains endured by the exiles. Through these texts, the cruel life of exile is portrayed as coming at the hands of an oppressor or tormentor, which in Second Isaiah represents the Babylonian empire.

For the prophet/poet, the exile is in some ways related to the Judean community’s unfaithful past: “Who gave up Jacob to the spoiler, and Israel to the robbers? Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned, in whose ways they would not walk, and whose law they would not obey? (cf. Is 40:1-2; Is 47:6). Nevertheless, the oppressive conditions experienced in exile are a direct result of an ungracious empire. Therefore, convincing the Judean community to return necessitated a rhetorical strategy that reminded the exiles of how grueling life in exile is. The prophet/poet capitalizes on there being an exile, and the harshness of it in order to win over the exiles to the idea of returning to Zion/Jerusalem. He seems to understand that appropriating a clear-eyed awareness of the honors of exile is a critical mental posture for successfully returning to a homeland. As Brueggemann maintains:

“Exile” articulates that the new place is not home and can never be home because its realities are essentially alien and inhospitable to

our true theological identity. Now I suggest that accepting identity as an exile, along with geographical reality, is an act of polemical theological imagination that guards against cultural assimilation.³⁰⁶

So we see that the prophet does not incorporate elements that are unfamiliar to the community's experience. He uses exile as a point of reference for creating the hope of a return.

Conveying an Awareness of Motherland

In Second Isaiah, the most compelling rhetorical device used in recovering a distinct cultural identity among the Judean exiles is the personification of Zion/Jerusalem as a woman.³⁰⁷ While John J. Schmitt, suggests that the prophets often recognized the city Jerusalem as feminine and chose the individual feminine

³⁰⁶ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 110-111.

³⁰⁷ The bibliography on the topic of personified Zion/Jerusalem continues to grow, see Mark E. Biddle, "The Figure of Lady Jerusalem: Identification, Deification and Personification of Cities in the Ancient Near East," in *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective*, ed. W.W. Hallo, Scripture in Context 4 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 173-94; D. Bourguet, *Des metaphors de Jérémie* (Paris: Gabalda, 1987) 477-510; F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1993); E.R. Follis, "The Holy City as Daughter," *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 173-84; Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City as Yahweh's Wife* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer, ed. *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and The New Testament* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000); Odil Hannes Steck, "Zion als Gelände und Gestalt: Überlegungen zur Wahrnehmung Jerusalems als Stadt und Frau im Alten Testament," in *Gottesknecht und Zion* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1992), 126-45; John J. Schmitt, "The Motherhood of God and Zion as Mother," *Revue Biblique* 4 (1985): 557-69.

imagery according to the specific moment and its needs.³⁰⁸ Mark E. Biddle counters that “the feminine imagery employed in the Hebrew Bible with reference to Jerusalem is not the result of the whims of individual poets, but rests on a well-developed tradition of great antiquity and geographical scope.”³⁰⁹ Indeed, metaphors are peculiar to regions yet transcend eras. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson point out that metaphorical concepts are based on cultural experience, and furthermore that a “conceptual metaphor,” is a metaphor so deeply imbedded in the culture as to be virtually invisible.³¹⁰ It is therefore not surprising that Julie Galambush reminds us that, “both culturally and symbolically, the identification of the city as feminine proves impossible to eradicate fully.”³¹¹ Hence, the symbolic affinities of Zion/Jerusalem as female hold enormous potential for recovering an identity emerges out of a particular homeland. Personified as woman, Zion/Jerusalem not only conveys a vivid image of homeland, but, as a female persona, the homeland becomes intensely personal.

In Second Isaiah, the city of Zion/Jerusalem is “mother” of her inhabitants. For both the Judean exiles and their descendents, Zion/Jerusalem as mother seeks to

³⁰⁸ John J. Schmitt, “The City as Woman in Isaiah 1-39,” in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition*, ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans (New York: Brill, 1997), 102.

³⁰⁹ Biddle, “The Figure of Lady Jerusalem,” 187.

³¹⁰ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 14; Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 20. Much of her discussion pertains to the last chapters of Ezekiel, however, her insights concerning the use of city language can be applied here.

³¹¹ Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 157.

transform a destroyed city into a living personality with emotions, thus nurturing and promoting a personal and emotional attachment to the exile's homeland. The femaleness and motherhood of Zion comes to the fore in Isaiah 49. She who had thought of herself as forsaken (49:14) by her husband now rejoices in the return of her children (vv.18, 22).³¹² In verses 14 and 15, mother Zion/Jerusalem speaks: "The LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me." Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you." Personified Zion/Jerusalem appears as the helpless, hapless mother who birthed and nurtured her children, only to suffer rejection and alienation from her husband on account of their sins.³¹³ The image of Zion/Jerusalem as a mother experiencing loss and grief serves to elicit the emotions of Second Isaiah's exilic audience. In Isaiah 49:20-21, mother Zion/Jerusalem has children "of her bereavement":³¹⁴

The children born in the time of your bereavement will yet say in your hearing: "The place is too crowded for me; make room for me to settle." Then you will say in your heart, "Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away-- so who has reared these? I was left all alone-- where then have these come from?"

³¹² Schmitt, "The Motherhood of God and Zion as Mother," 561.

³¹³ Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, *Isaiah's Vision and the Family of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 175.

³¹⁴ Schmitt, "The Motherhood of God and Zion as Mother," 562.

The central issue in these verses is Zion/Jerusalem's childlessness and thereafter her astonishing multitude of children.³¹⁵ According to Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, Jerusalem's self-descriptions in this passage (I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away...) bespeak women's lot in warfare.³¹⁶ Thus, being "bereaved", "barren" and "exiled" not only intensifies the pain felt by mother Zion/Jerusalem, but also lures the exilic community to become personally involved in her rescue. At the fringes of this image, however, is the scene given in verse 22 in which the sons and daughters of mother Zion/Jerusalem will be returned to her:³¹⁷ "Thus says the Lord GOD: I will soon lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders." The contrast here is of present with future. The lonely city in a land of desolate places (Is 49:19), will no longer be alone, but will be teeming with Zion/Jerusalem's children.³¹⁸ These images evoke a strong familial connection between mother Zion/Jerusalem and the Judean exilic community, which allows the exiles to form a restorative emotional bond with their motherland.

The address shifts in Isaiah 50:1-3. Here, the prophet/poet offers glimpses of an intense family drama in which YHWH, the husband, denies having either divorced

³¹⁵ Sarah J. Dille, *Mixing Metaphors: God as Mother and Father in Deutero-Isaiah* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 140.

³¹⁶ Darr, *Isaiah's Vision*, 66.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

³¹⁸ Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 143.

Zion/Jerusalem or sold her children:³¹⁹ “. . . Where is your mother's bill of divorce . . . and for your transgressions your mother was put away.” In this verse, Zion/Jerusalem is not only a mother but also a forsaken wife. Implied in the phrase “bill of divorce,” is the idea that YHWH is bound to Zion by marriage. Her marital status not only heightens the exiles’ emotional attachment to their mother Zion/Jerusalem, but also to YHWH their father.³²⁰ For the prophet/poet, the exile represents an intense family affair of abandonment, sin, and betrayal.

In Isaiah 51:17-23, the prophet/poet presents a retrospective look at mother Zion/Jerusalem. She is bidden to awaken herself from the stupor caused by drinking the cup of divine wrath (v.17), which leads to a state of confusion in verse 18: “There is no one to guide her among all the children she has borne; there is no one to take her by the hand among all the children she has brought up.”³²¹ In the midst of her confusion lie her distressed children (v.19): “Your children have fainted, they lie at the head of every street like an antelope in a net; they are full of the wrath of the LORD, the rebuke of your God.” The images of a delirious mother and fainted children demand that the exiles become more personally involved with their motherland. It is through their personal involvement that the prophet/poet is able to acquire the necessary energies to recover a vanquished cultural identity.

³¹⁹ Patricia Tull Willey, *Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 203.

³²⁰ Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 159.

³²¹ Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 115.

The imagery shifts in Isaiah 54:1-3; the wife/mother who was abandoned is now restored to her uxorial status and maternal function.³²² Once “desolate and barren,” Zion/Jerusalem will bear numerous children and is urged to rejoice. This image of an abandoned Zion/Jerusalem echoes the wife/mother image in Is 50:1-3, which assures the prophet/poet of the desired response from the exilic community-- personal involvement. In Isaiah 54:4, however, allusions to Zion/Jerusalem’s widowhood linger: "Fear not, for you will not be put to shame; Neither feel humiliated, for you will not be disgraced; But you will forget the shame of your youth, And the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more." This passage identifies the years of Zion/Jerusalem’s widowhood and the disgrace of widowhood foregrounds the vulnerability of being without a protector or provider.³²³ Here, the exilic audience is allowed to eaves drop on a personal conversation between YHWH and his wife Zion/Jerusalem. Its sensitive content draws the exiles to investigate further the characters involved. The marital drama intensifies in Isaiah 54:5-6:

For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the LORD has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like the wife of a man's youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you.

In the past, Zion/Jerusalem was abandoned like a forsaken and grieved wife (v. 6). Now YHWH, her husband (54:5), comes to her seeking reconciliation and even

³²² Schmitt, “The Motherhood of God and Zion as Mother,” 561.

³²³ Darr, *Isaiah’s Vision*, 188-89.

acknowledging that perhaps he went too far.³²⁴ In the end, Zion/Jerusalem is the faithful wife of her husband.³²⁵ And YHWH is her husband who for a moment had forsaken her (Is 54:4-7).³²⁶ Husband, wife, mother and father are all that form the prophet/poet's worldview of exile and homeland, which is the same worldview he seeks to use to replace the thwarted worldview imposed by the Babylonian empire.

In brief, the visionary experience provided by a personified female Zion/Jerusalem is one that seeks to transform a despondent Judean exilic community. Schmitt states that "the city is always feminine grammatically and has images applied to her that go beyond grammatical gender into the realm of psychology, social roles and personal identity."³²⁷ Second Isaiah unfolds a drama of familial proportions that involves mother Zion/Jerusalem, her husband YHWH, and her children. This drama, however, seeks more than a benign response on the part of the Judean exiles and their descendents. It is projected onto the imagination of the exilic community in resistance to the worldview imposed by the Babylonian empire. As mother, Zion/Jerusalem urges the exiles to transform their thinking of a desolate city into a living motherland. Through this transformed thinking a

³²⁴ Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, "Alas, She Has Become a Harlot," but Who's to Blame? Unfaithful-Female Imagery in Isaiah's Vision," in *Passion Vitality, and Foment: The Dynamics of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Lamontte M. Luker (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 66.

³²⁵ John J. Schmitt, "Israel and Zion-Two Gendered Images: Biblical Speech Traditions and Their Contemporary Neglect," *Horizons* 18 (1991): 20.

³²⁶ Berges, "Personifications and Prophetic," 62.

³²⁷ Schmitt, "The Motherhood of God and Zion as Mother," 561.

vanquished cultural identity is recovered, and a return journey is soon to follow.

The exile to Babylon was a radical and complete loss of land—the loss of homeland was a loss of a significant source of honorable identity.³²⁸

In the end, through a politically charged poetic voice combined with distinctive images (i.e. Jacob/Israel, Zion/Jerusalem, Queen Babylon), Second Isaiah recovers a vision of exile that prompts a return movement among the Judean exiles and their descendents. Underneath Second Isaiah's vision of exile is the memory of Judah's unfaithfulness to YHWH, which, in turn prompts differences between the identity and faith of the community and the seductive urgings and promises of the empire to become more apparent.³²⁹ Moreover, Second Isaiah's vision of exile emerges as a social critique on the empire's oppressive rule over the Judean exilic community, which is compatible with Second Isaiah's ultimate hope, the return of the Judean community to their homeland. Brueggemann eloquently captures this idea:

The central task of 2 Isaiah is to invite people home, to create a sense of that prospect and hope. But in order to do that, the poet had to convert Babylonian Jews into exiles, to persuade displaced people that after two generations, this is still not home.

It is clear that in Second Isaiah's vision of exile, there is a voice of resistance and opposition to the imperial forces that create an oppressive exilic experience. Second Isaiah employs a political rhetoric infused with an intense symbolic language to

³²⁸ Sarah J. Dille, "Honor Restored: Honor, Shame and God as Redeeming Kinsman in Second Isaiah," in *Relating to the Text: Interdisciplinary and Form-Critical Insights on the Bible*, ed. Timothy J. Sandoval and Carleen Mandolfo (New York : T & T Clark International, 2003), 235.

³²⁹ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 111.

counter an imperially imposed reality. The poetry of the prophet is highly ideological in that it creates a distinct view of exile through a fierce critique of the empire.

Second Isaiah's Vision of Exile and Mexican Immigrant *Corridos*

From the perspective of diaspora theology a deeper understanding of Second Isaiah's vision of exile can be achieved within the broader context of the Mexican immigrant *corridos* (ballads). From this broader context, one can draw compelling equivalences with Second Isaiah's political vision of exile and the images of immigration presented in various Mexican immigrant *corridos*. Martha Idalia Chew-Sanchez suggests that we find these *corridos* are "an important Mexican popular cultural form that emerges as an expression of oppositional culture due to its message of resistance, empowerment, and social critique."³³⁰ Similar to Second Isaiah, *corridos* about the Mexican immigrant experience use a rhetorical strategy that aims to recover a distinct Mexican immigrant identity amid various forces of imperial domination. For instance, in the ballad *Mexicano cien por ciento/ One Hundred Percent Mexican*, the singer dedicates his song to a specific group--those living in a "foreign land":

Soy Amigos cien por ciento mexicano	I am, my friends, one hundred
percent	Mexican,
Y a mi raza le dedico mi canción	And to my people I dedicate my
	song

³³⁰ Chew-Sanchez, "Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora," 11.

Los que se hayan trabajando en suelo extraño	To those working in a foreign land
Alejados de mi patria y mi nación.	Far away from my homeland and my nation. ³³¹

In these first lines, the singer is identifying a distinct group--those “working” away from their homeland. This address not only identifies the singer’s audience, but also serves to reinforce a collective Mexican immigrant identity within the United States. This address has much in common with the rhetorical aims of the Jacob/Israel address in Second Isaiah: “But now hear, O **Jacob** my servant, Israel whom I have chosen!” (Is 44:1; c.f. 41: 8; 46:3; 48:12) In recovering a distinct cultural identity both addresses appeal to a particular historical memory that is rooted in a homeland and a nation. In the *corrido*, the address serves to remind the singer’s audience that they are not in their homeland, but they are “far away.” In the same way, the name Jacob serves to persuade the Judean exilic community that Babylon is not its permanent home.

Dimensions of Suffering

In *Mexicano cien por ciento/ One Hundred Percent Mexican*, the *corrido* alludes

Por mojados nos conocen d’este lado	We are known on this side (USA) as wetbacks
y los gringos nos desprecian sin razón	And the gringos despise us without reason
no se acuerdan que esta tierra que ahora tienen	They do not remember that this land they now have
fue de México en un tiempo de valor	Belonged to Mexico and was of great value

³³¹ All the *corridos* used in this study including their English translation are taken from Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 217-18.

In this stanza, the poetic persona reinforces the oppressive life conditions on “this side” (i.e. (USA). He acknowledges the derogatory epithet with which Mexican immigrants are known—*mojados* (river crossers, the English equivalent of הַעֲבָרִי), which is only evoked on “this side,” the U.S. side.³³² Within the borders of the U.S. empire, they are despised by agents of the empire, *los gringos*. The singer vilifies the U.S. empire by recalling its conquest of former Mexican territory. For many Mexican immigrants, this history of conquest adds to their anxiety and shame. Recalling the Babylonian empire’s spirit of conquest is of course also a trait present in Second Isaiah (cf. Is 48). In Isaiah 49:19a, the prophet/poet recalls the effects of the Babylonian conquest on the land of Judah: “Surely your waste and your desolate places and your devastated land . . .” For Second Isaiah, the Babylonian empire not only represents the colonizer, but also the, oppressor (Is 51: 13), tormentor (Is 51:23), and captors (Is 42:6-7) of the Judean exilic community. Hence, both the *corrido* and Second Isaiah use their critique of the empire in order to reorient their respective communities toward their homeland. For both, life in the empire for the exile or the immigrant represents miserable repressive and socially oppressive existence.

In the *corrido*, the empire represents a “foreign land” or “this side.” Such wording allows the singer to create ideas of returning to Mexico, much as Second Isaiah did too:

A trabajar yo he cruzado la frontera I have crossed the border to

³³² Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 219.

Recordando a mi familia con dolor	work Remembering my family with great pain
Que la Virgen los proteja mientras vuelvo	May the Virgin protect them until I return
por las noches le ruego a mi lindo Dios.	I pray nightly to my beautiful Lord.

This stanza subtly incites its immigrant listeners to recall their own painful memories of families left behind, which, in turn, leads to their hope of a return. It is in the memory of families left behind that Mexico and the United States begin to represent two distinct poles for Mexican immigrants. While physically they are in the U.S., emotionally their hearts and minds are in Mexico. Segovia explains that the exile experience for an immigrant is to be “a part of both worlds and yet of none; at home in two cultures and in neither one; speaking in two tongues with none to call my own; in the world but not of it.”³³³ Through the *corrido*, the singer activates an alternative worldview by emphasizing the pain and suffering of the migratory process. Central to this pain is the reality that families are separated during the migratory process. In terms of Second Isaiah, the reality of family separation plays an important role in the prophet/poet’s view of exile. Within the context of exile, the prophet/poet depicts Zion/Jerusalem and the wife, who is abandoned by her husband (cf. Is 54:7), and the mother, who is severed from her children (cf. Is 49:12, 22).

³³³ “In the World but Not of It,” 202-03.

In *corridos* about the Mexican immigrant experience, the U.S. empire's oppressive treatment of immigrants is reiterated, such as *Los ilegales* by Pepe Gavilán:

Con cuenta tristeza canto	How sadly I sing
Lo que sufre un ilegal	About how much an illegal suffers
En este país hermano	In this our brother country (U.S.)
Pero que nos tartan mal	But which treats us badly. ³³⁴

The sufferings of the Mexican immigrant are attributed to “our brother country,” which is the U.S. empire. The theme of suffering at the hands of the Babylonian empire is woven throughout Second Isaiah. The prophet/poet discloses an emphatic insight into the painful experiences and feelings of the exiles. The exiles endure physical suffering (cf. Is 40: 29-30; 41:11-12; 46: 1-3; 49: 9), political suffering (cf. Is 41: 12; 45:13), and psychological suffering (cf. Is 41: 10a, 13-14; 43:1,5; 44:1-8; 49:13).³³⁵

In the ballad *Jaula de oro/ Golden Cage*, an immigrant father expresses his sorrow at his status as an undocumented worker, which makes him a virtual prisoner in the United States.³³⁶

¿De qué me sirve el dinero	What good is money to me
Si estoy como prisionero	If I'm living like a prisoner?
Dentro de esta gran nación.	Inside this grand nation
Cuando me acuerdo hasta lloro	When I remember this I weep
que aunque la jaula sea de oro	For even though the cage is golden

³³⁴ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 219.

³³⁵ Eben Scheffler, “Dimensions of Suffering in Deutero-Isaiah,” in *Old Testament Science and Reality : A Mosaic for Deist*, eds. Willie Wessels and Eben Scheffler (Pretoria, South Africa: Verba Vitae Publishers, 1992), 213-21.

³³⁶ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 290.

no deja de ser prisión

It is still a prison.

A sense of deep distress at his “imprisonment” pervades these lyrics. The myth of streets paved with gold turns out to be a prison. While in the U.S., many Mexican immigrants endure intense discrimination, which, in turn, makes them feel imprisoned. This feeling of imprisonment is often perpetuated when they return home. The migrant’s desire to feel at home is never fully satisfied because the homeland, frozen in the time of the migrant’s mind-no longer exists.³³⁷ The image of imprisonment likewise characterizes the vision of exile portrayed in Second Isaiah. The prophet/poet describes the exilic life in words like “prisoners”, “dungeon”, and “darkness” (cf. Is 42: 6-7). Other glimpses of this image occur in Is 48:9, “saying to the **prisoners**, "Come out," to those who are in darkness.” Hence, both texts understand exile/immigration in terms of painful imprisonment.

In seventh stanza, Mexican immigrants suffer as a result of racial discrimination:

Los ilegales sufrimos	Illegals like us suffer
mucha discriminación	Much discriminationn
nos persiguen como ratas	They hunt us like rats
agents de migración.	Those immigration agents.

The singer and his community are “hunted as rats” by agents of the U.S. empire. “Rats” represent all that is undesirable in the Western context. In the United States, many Mexican immigrants and their descendents are subject to racial linguistics and cultural prejudices.³³⁸ As stated by Daniel G. Groody, “As a result, immigrants

³³⁷ Martínez, *The New Americans*, 177.

receive a double blow: They are forced to leave the homeland they love and belong to, yet often they feel unwelcome and unwanted when they finally come to the United States.”³³⁹ Suffering as a result of the Babylonian empire’s discriminatory treatment of the aged in the Judean exilic community is seen in Is 46:6d, “you showed them no mercy; on the aged you made your **yoke** exceedingly heavy.” The images of suffering in both the *corrido* and Second Isaiah can be understood as the punishment meted out on them because of their subversive agenda to the empire’s oppressive control.

In similar fashion, in the ballad *Los que cruzaron* (Those Who Crossed Over), Mexican immigrants are described as being like worms:

Cuando tocaron la orilla	When they touched the river’s edge
Los guardias les dispararon	The guards fired at them
Y se rifaron la vida	And they pitted their lives
Contra los americanos,	Against the Americans
y alli quedaron regados	and there they ended up
como si fueran gusanos	Like worms. ³⁴⁰

The worm image suggests that the Mexican immigrant community is a despised community in the United States. Worms live underground—unseen and unnoticed. They are loathed by many. This same reference is used for the Judean exilic community in Isaiah 41:14: “Do not fear, you worm Jacob, you insect Israel! I will help you, says the LORD; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.” The Hebrew

³³⁸ Chew-Sanchez, “Cultural Memory in the Rituals of the Mexican Diaspora,” 3.

³³⁹ *Border of Death, Valley of Life: An Immigrant Journey of Heart and Spirit* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 26.

³⁴⁰ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 212-13.

word תולעת (worm) is a symbol for insignificance. Richard Clifford writes, “Yahweh addresses the people as “worm Jacob,” most probably a quotation from the lament Ps 22:6: “But I am a worm and no man.” Such laments must have been much used in the Exile. As it confesses its weakness. . . .” In parallel, these texts utilize unappealing insect images to describe their status in exile.

In the next stanza of this same *corrido*, the singer moves from issues of discrimination to issues of exploitation:

Para conseguir trabajos	In order to get work
Vergüenza y humillaciones	We go through shame and humiliation
Se aprovechan de nosotros	They take advantage of us
Los que se dicen patronos.	Those that call themselves bosses.

For the singer and his immigrant community, finding a livelihood in the United States is filled with ignominy. Their marginal status within the U.S. empire renders them vulnerable to exploitative activity, for example, by corporations which maintain the upper hand through there being such an abundance of unskilled immigrant laborers. Able to pick and choose, employers create conditions in which workers compete for jobs, are willing to accept increasingly low pay and poor working conditions, and thus are much more vulnerable to being exploited and manipulated.³⁴¹ This theme of exploitation can also be seen in Second Isaiah and the words of comfort to Zion/Jerusalem. In Isaiah 49, language like “those who laid you waste” (v.17) and “your waste and your desolate places,” imply acts of

³⁴¹ Groody, *Border of Death*, 28.

exploitation. As for the exiles, their exploitation is reflected in the depletion of their physical strength by the empire (cf. Is 40: 28-29; 42:24).

The Journey North

In *corrdios* about the Mexican immigrant experience, the journey to the United States is described as arduous and difficult. The ballad *El corredor del ilegal* (The Ballad of the Illegal Alien), for example, describes physical hunger as part of the Mexican immigrant journeying to the United States:

Andando yo en la frontera	As I was walking along the border
Ya me cargaba el hambre.	I was already burdened by hunger.
Dicen que el hambre es canija,	They say that hunger is unrelenting,
Pero es más del que ya le ande.	But it is more painful to the hungry one. ³⁴²

The hunger remains present, even at the beginning of the immigrant journey. It is described as unrelenting (*canija*). In Second Isaiah, hunger is also linked to the journey experience: “they shall not hunger or thirst; neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.” (Is. 49:10) For Second Isaiah, hunger and thirst--elements of the exilic journey—are sure to be absent from the return journey.

In *corridos* describing the Mexican immigrant journey, there are images of pathways and landscapes. For instance, in the ballad *Los alambrados* (The Wire Jumpers) by Antonio Marcos Solis, Mexican immigrants traverse over hills and minor roads:

³⁴² Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 187-88.

Se cruzaron por el cerro	They went through the hills.
Su rumbo habían agarrado	They followed the way
Iban rodeando veredas	Close to the sideroads
Como lo habían acordado	As they had planned.
Era de noche y por eso	It was night and that is why
La vigilancia burlaron.	They fooled the border patrol. ³⁴³

For these Mexican immigrants, journeying North means knowing “the way” (*su rumbo*). In Rubén Martínez’s words, “The road is often an unpredictable path.”³⁴⁴

In the ballad *Frontera internacional* (International Border) by Enrique Valencia, death happens along the way in the hills: *Frontera, dejo mi patria y mi hogar* (Frontera, I leave my country and my home) / . . . *de que mi hermano al pasar* (that my brother upon crossing) / *haya muerto allá en el cerro* (Died there in the hills).

Few people in Mexico leave their homes on a whim; migration is no American-style joyride—there are dangers on the road to the “promise land”—unscrupulous smugglers, harrowing illegal journeys through rugged terrain, the trauma of family separation, the sting of discrimination, the bewildering encounter with a foreign tongue and mores, labor conditions ripe for accidents and illness and even death.³⁴⁵

In Second Isaiah, the theme of way, highway, mountain, and hill are ubiquitous. In Isaiah 40:3-4, these images are highlighted:

A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

³⁴³ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 198-99.

³⁴⁴ *The New Americans*, 152.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

For a returning Judean community, these elements of the journey would have been a major source of anxiety (i.e. pathways and landscape). Their emphasis most likely assumes their familiarity among the Judean community--probably aspects of their journey into exile.

Other aspects of the landscape mentioned in Mexican immigrant *corridos* include desert and river. In the ballad *La cucaracha mojada* (The Wetback Cockroach), the desert is a way for many Mexican immigrants to enter the U.S.:

Todos se van de la patria,	All are leaving the motherland,
La cucaracha también,	The cockroach is leaving too
Unos van por el desierto	Some are leaving through the desert
Y otros cruzan con el tren	Others are crossing by train.

Apart from hilly terrain, the journey involves crossing the fierce desert. These deadly dangers of the wilderness are not far removed from the contemporary Mexican migratory experience. For many Mexican migrants, the way to the U.S. is through one of six principle routes, the 130-mile long *El Camino del Diablo* (the Devil's Road), which starts in Ajo, Arizona and goes west toward Yuma, Arizona. The *Camino del Diablo* entails a tortuous, unmarked hundred-mile journey on which water and food are crucial to one's survival. Key to surviving the journey are the water holes dispersed throughout the arid landscape. The paucity of water holes and the mileage between them (17, 23, 31, 3, 17, and 40 miles respectively) conspire to provide conditions ripe for an endless series of tragedies that befit the name *Camino del Diablo*.³⁴⁶ Their search for water often leads many Mexican

³⁴⁶ John Annerino, *Dead in Their Tracks: Crossing America's Desert Borderlands* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1999), 9-15.

migrants to wander the desert in circles. Once in the desert, however, migrants not only suffer from the appalling heat and interminable distances between waterholes, but they are often attacked, robbed, or murdered.³⁴⁷ In Second Isaiah, it is clear that the desert or wilderness was likewise a major source of fear for the Judean community. In Isaiah 41:18-19, the desert and wilderness are miraculously transformed: “. . . I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. . . . I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive; I will set in the **desert** the cypress, the plane and the pine together.” (cf. Is 40:3; 43:20). The wilderness (מִדְבָּר) barely sustains life--the periphery, the undomesticated, the uncivilized.³⁴⁸ The wilderness is a place of utter desolation: a vast void of parched earth, with no streams or rivers to provide sustenance for plants and wildlife.³⁴⁹

In *Los mandados* (The Errands) by Jorge Lerma, the journey involves crossing the Rio Grande:

Crucé el Rio Grande nadando I crossed the Rio Grande swimming

³⁴⁷ Annerino, *Dead in Their Tracks*, 26.

³⁴⁸ Robert L. Cohn, *The Shape of Sacred Space: Four Biblical Studies* (Scholars Press), 16.

³⁴⁹ Shemaryahu Talmon “The Desert Motif in the Bible and in Qumran Literature,” in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 42. Talmon identifies three categories within the biblical materials meant by the Hebrew term midbar--his third category defines wilderness as imagined in Exodus and in this article--Midbar denotes the true desert, the arid zones beyond the borders of cultivated land--He concludes--this meaning is well rendered in English by ‘wilderness’ 40-41.

Sin importarme dos reales Without caring one bit³⁵⁰

For the Mexican immigrant, this river is crossed by swimming, which poses the threat of drowning. Indeed, in the ballad *Un noble engaño* (A Noble Deception) by Nicolás Ochoa and Paul Sandoval, the singer tells of the death of fifteen-year-old boy who drowns as he attempts to swim the swollen Rio Grande while his helpless brother helplessly watches in horror:

A Joaquín se le hizo fácil	Joaquín thought it was easy
El Río Grande cruzar	To Cross the Rio Grande.
Pero el Río Grande iba lleno	But the river was full
Pedro lloraba el fracaso.	Pedro cried at the failure
Casi perdió la razón	He almost went in sane
Al ver a su hermano hogarse	Upon seeing his brother drown
En ese río traidor.	In that treacherous river. ³⁵¹

The Rio Grande (*río traidor*) is perhaps the greatest threat of the Mexican immigrant's journey northward. According to an ongoing study by the University of Houston, throughout the nineties, about 72 percent of border deaths were by drowning, belying the Rio Grande's placid origins. Locally, such victims are known as the "floaters," immigrants who drown while trying to cross the river.³⁵² This danger of drowning along the journey is echoed in Second Isaiah: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame

³⁵⁰ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 213-14.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 300-01.

³⁵² John Sharp, "Immigration: Crossing the Line," Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, <http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/taxforms/96-599/chap11.pdf> (accessed August 12, 2005).

shall not consume you.” (Is 43:2) Underneath this verse lie the fears of the Judean community about journeying home—realistic fears of real dangers acquired during their journey into exile.

Yet immigrants’ fears of danger are not confined to natural threats such rivers, but can also come from the danger they feel in the way they are treated by those in United States. Another song highlighting the Mexican immigrant experience is *Campesino asalariado* (Salaried Farm Worker) by Victor Cordero. In the third stanza, the singer muses:

Compadezco a los braceros	I feel sorry for the braceros
Que se alejan de sus tierras,	Who leave their land,
los arrear como becerros	They are driven like calves
pa’ que crucen la frontera	So they can cross the border
y los tartan como perros	And they treat them like dogs
pa’ que cumplan su faena	So they can get their work done. ³⁵³

Again, animal imagery like “calves” and “dogs” only intensifies feelings of exploitation and discrimination in the Mexican immigrant experience. In Isaiah 53:7, which is part of the section entitled The Servant, an animal simile is also used to reflect the painful suffering of the mysterious servant figure: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” In this verse, we can overhear the voice of the *braceros* (Mexican migrant workers) in the above *corrido*. There is a sort of unjust sacrifice they must pay, which for many involves their own lives.

³⁵³ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 236-37.

The Assimilation Process

In various *corridos*, the process of assimilating into the dominant Anglo-American Protestant culture is emphasized. Among the most vulnerable persons in this regard are the descendents of Mexican immigrants. The message in these *corridos* is that the Mexican culture is valued highly and loss of some or all aspects of this culture is viewed as a great tragedy.³⁵⁴ In *Juan Mojao* (John Wetback) by Eulalio González, the assimilation process is reflected in the immigrant's name change:

Al cruzar el Río Grande	Upon crossing the Rio Grande
Al entrar en U.S.A.	Upon entering the USA
se olvidó hasta de su nombre	He forgot even his name.
no Juan Pancho, no more Pancho	Not Juan Pancho, no more Pancho,
Johnny Frankie if its O.K.	Johnny Frankie, if it's O.K. ³⁵⁵

It is after the immigrant arrives into the U.S. that name change occurs. Associated with the name Juan Pancho is a deep sense of Mexicanness, whereas, the name “Johnny Frankie” reflects an extreme Americanness, thus, representing the immigrant's newly adopted identity. The issue of assimilation is repeated in the ballad *Juala de oro*. In this *corrido*, the father mourns the loss of his children, who now refuse to speak Spanish, do not identify themselves as Mexicans, and refuse to return to Mexico.³⁵⁶

Mis hijos no hablan conmigo My kids don't talk to me

³⁵⁴ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 290.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 291.

Otro idioma han aprendido	They've learned another language
Y olvidado el español	And they've forgotten their Spanish
Piengan como americanos	They think like Americans do
Niegan que son mexicanos	They deny they are Mexicans
Aunque tengan mi color	Even though they have my skin
	coloring. ³⁵⁷

In this stanza, the two lost elements of Mexican culture are the Spanish language and self-identification as Mexican. The first-generation migrant is trapped between past and future in a bewildering present, cut off from pueblo history and, tragically, from his own children, who, if born in the United States, will wind up speaking better English than Spanish.³⁵⁸ Similarly, the context from which Second Isaiah emerges involved a community that had now been in Babylon for two generations. Throughout Second Isaiah, there is a political rhetoric against the Babylonian religious practices surrounding the Judean exilic community. Idolatry appears prominently in Isaiah 40:18-20; 42:8; 44:9-20; 45:16, 20-21; 46:1-2; and 48:5.³⁵⁹ A concern of assimilation is also reflected in the prophet's creative use of ancient traditions to maintain a sense of identity in the midst of exile.³⁶⁰ The creation and exodus themes are among the most prevalent traditions (c.f. Is 43:1-7; 45:18; 48:20-21). For Second Isaiah, conforming to the religious practices of the empire is viewed as a burden rather than a blessing: "Bel bows down, Nebo stoops, their idols are on beasts and cattle; these things you carry are loaded as burdens on

³⁵⁷ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 292-93.

³⁵⁸ Martínez, *The New Americans*, 177.

³⁵⁹ Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow*, 32.

³⁶⁰ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 102.

wearry animals.” Among other tactics to address the issue of assimilation is Second Isaiah’s frequent designation of Jacob/Israel for the Judean exilic community (Is 40:27; 41:14; 42:24; 43:1, 22,28; 44:1, 5, 21,23; 45:4; 46:3; 48:1, 12: 49:5, 6). This distinct title evokes a unique cultural identity that is in contrast to the one represented in Babylonian society.³⁶¹

Family Left Behind

Among the more prevalent themes in Mexican immigrant *corridos* is the link between Mexico (*madre patria*)—the homeland-- and certain women figures. First, there is the image of mother and Mexico. In the *El bracero* (the migrant worker) by Rafael Buendía, the mother is left behind: *La madre espera* (Their mother waits)/ *Con el rostro marchitado* (With her aging face). There is a sense of loss of what has been left behind, but what has been left behind is a mother. It is the mother that shapes the Mexican immigrant’s innermost self and identity.³⁶² In the ballad *Frontera internacional*, the image of mother continues in the spoken part of the song:

Cuantas madres se han quedado	How many mothers have waited
Llorando aquel hijo amado	Crying for their beloved sons
Y muriendo de dolor	And dying from the pain? ³⁶³

³⁶¹ Richard J. Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading: An Interpretation of Second Isaiah* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 91.

³⁶² Felix Wilfred, “Introduction: The Art of Negotiating the Frontiers,” in *Frontier Violations: The Beginnings of New Identities*, ed. Felix Wilfred and Oscar Beozzo, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), ix-x.

³⁶³ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 227-28.

The image of a lamenting mother over the loss of her sons is vividly portrayed in these lyrics. This is reminiscent of Zion/Jerusalem's cry for her children in Second Isaiah. In Isaiah 49:21-22, the future of mother Zion/Jerusalem is the recovery of her children from exile:

Then you will say in your heart, "Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away-- so who has reared these? I was left all alone-- where then have these come from? "Thus says the Lord GOD: I will soon lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders.

The mother's aloneness and barrenness is a result of the Babylonian exile.

Muilenburg writes, "aloneness and separation aroused a special dread for the ancient Hebrew so great was his sense of community."³⁶⁴ It is this image of being left behind that is particularly compelling, whether in Second Isaiah or in the *corridos*, because kinship ties are central to human wellbeing and at-homeness.

This image of a left behind mother is repeated in the ballad *La boda fatal* (The Fatal Wedding) :

Mi viejita, mi madre querida, me abrazaba y llorando me dijo:	My dear old beloved mother While hugging me and crying d did say:
--Vuelve pronto, hijito de mi alma	"Please come back soon, my beloved son.
Tú bien sabes que te necesito,"	You know very well how much I need you. ³⁶⁵

The mother's need for her son is dramatically portrayed, and is all the more poignant because the mother is so often central to the Mexican immigrant's

³⁶⁴ "The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66," 576.

³⁶⁵ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 269-68.

memory of home. In the ballad *Las pobres ilegales* (Poor Illegal Immigrant Women) by José Martínez Loza, it is this same poignant pain of abandonment that leads mothers/wives to migrate north in search of their lost children and husbands:

Se van ilusionadas	They leave their land with dreams
dejando sus cariños	Leaving their loved ones behind
buscando a sus maridos	In search of their husbands
llorando por sus niños	Crying for their children.
Sufriendo humillaciones	Suffering all kinds of humiliations ³⁶⁶

With their husbands gone, wives are forsaken and left to suffer “all kinds of humiliations.” This image of a forsaken wife is also present in Second Isaiah, where in Isaiah 54: 4-8, Zion/Jerusalem is forsaken by her husband YHWH (c.f. Is 49:14). Yet, her shame of abandonment is not permanent:

Do not fear, for you will not **be ashamed**; do not be discouraged, for you will not **suffer disgrace**; for you will forget the **shame** of your youth, and the **disgrace of your widowhood** you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the LORD has called you like a wife **forsaken and grieved** in spirit, like the wife of a man's youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I **abandoned** you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer.

The restoration of a fallen Jerusalem (homeland) is embodied in images of a forsaken wife and a merciful husband. As a woman left behind, Jerusalem shares the bitterest fate of an Israelite woman: infertility, desolation (v.1) and widowhood

³⁶⁶ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 286-87.

(v.4). To have no family meant to be without any economic basis and without legal protection.³⁶⁷

The homeland's link to mother, wife, family, creates hopes of a return, such as in the ballad *Adiós, Mexico querido* (Good-bye, My Beloved Mexico) by Juan José Molina:

Te dejo también mis hijos	I also leave you my children
Mi mujer y hasta mi hogar:	My wife and even my home.
Adios, Mexico querido,	Good-bye, my beloved Mexico,
Quizá pueda regresar.	Perhaps I shall return. ³⁶⁸

A solitary as life can be for Mexican man on the migrant road, so it is for the family he leaves behind in the *pueblo*, for the wife without a husband for the better part of the year, for children without their father.³⁶⁹ This same theme is repeated in the ballad *Desde el México de afuera* (From the Other Mexico) by José Vaca Flores:

Desde el Mexico de afuera	From the other Mexico I bring
los saludo	you greetings,
y aunque no los alcance les	And even though from far away
extiendo mi mano	I extend my hand to you
ya tengo hambre de andar allí	I hunger to be there in my land
en mi tierra	
de estar con mis viejitos, mi	And to be with my parents, my
novia y mis hermanos	my girlfriend, and my kinfolk. ³⁷⁰

³⁶⁷ Gerlinde Baumann, "Prophetic Objections to YHWH as the Violent Husband of Israel: Reinterpretations of the Prophetic Marriage Metaphor in Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55)," in *Prophets and Daniel: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner (New York, NY: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 109.

³⁶⁸ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 257-58.

³⁶⁹ Martínez, *The New Americans*, 151.

³⁷⁰ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 260-63.

It is not so much the physical land that stimulates the return of the Mexican immigrant, but rather the hunger to be close to family (*familia*) once more. The familial images provoke deep flesh and blood emotion that can only be remedied by the reunion of the abandoned family and displaced immigrant. The theme of family separation and family reunion become an integral part of Second Isaiah's rhetorical strategy. The prophet/poet's emphasis on mother Zion/Jerusalem's aloneness (cf. Is 51:18-20) would have been extremely powerful in persuading the exiles to return. Like the images family separation in the *corridos*, Second Isaiah's images of Zion/Jerusalem as mother and wife entice the emotions, which makes the return not a simple journey but a family emergency.

Conclusion

The flights of Isaianic rhetoric in chapters 40-55 are required more to persuade people who are by and large quite comfortable in Babylon—compared to the fertile and lush land of the two rivers, the barren hill country of Judah, with its paltry collection of ruins, is hardly worth the effort of uprooting and resettlement, let alone facing up to the dangers that such an exercise might entail.³⁷¹ There is a fascination with the role of suffering in producing political change—hence the oppressive empire, exilic journey and exilic life. Visible in the poetry of Second Isaiah is a cohesive rhetorical strategy, a major aspect of which is the setting forth of a vision of exile which links the Judean exiles and their descendents to a broader

³⁷¹ Roland Boer, "Deutero-Isaiah: Historical Materialism and Biblical Theology," *Biblical Interpretation* 6 (1998): 182.

process of liberation from an oppressive empire. This vision binds the exilic community to a distinctive Judean identity that is diametrically opposed to the imperially imposed worldview. We see in Second Isaiah that this exilic community came to accept Babylonian definitions of reality and did not know any others were available.³⁷² But constructively we see also the prophet/poet's rhetorical efforts to remind the exilic community and reunite them with their ancestral motherland.

Through a vision of exile, Second Isaiah reframes beliefs related to the Babylonian empire that the exiles are those who trust in other gods and worship them. Some of the exiles moved into Babylonian service ready to relinquish feelings of abandonment by embracing Babylonian religion and culture as implied by the satirical diatribes of Is 40-55 against the alluring cults of Babylon, this does not need to continue to be the state of things.³⁷³ So Second Isaiah offers the Judean exilic community a new sense of diasporic identity for the sake of creating a return. With all the time in exile, the identity of Israel is fragmented into dispersed groups throughout the nations and submerged in the middle of other cultures. Therefore, central to Second Isaiah's rhetorical agenda is the creation of a distinct identity based on the reality of exile. In the words of Brueggemann, the poetry of Second Isaiah is “. . . an inventive, creative act of poetry that means to speak this community out beyond present circumstance by the force of the poetic word.”³⁷⁴

³⁷² Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 95.

³⁷³ Gottwald, “Social Class and Ideology,” 48.

³⁷⁴ *Hopeful Imagination*, 95.

The parallels between the circumstances of the exiles and those of the Mexican immigration experience are worth attention. The displaced world of the exile reflected in the imagery used in Second Isaiah is also found in the Mexican immigrant *corridos*. The *corrido* is described by migrants as symbolic representation of their collective migrant experiences, of their cultural memory that evoke the repressive forces impinging upon the migrant communities.³⁷⁵ In them migrants are portrayed as people who are physically displaced, who live and work in the margins and who therefore, have a marginal life.³⁷⁶ Throughout Second Isaiah, the images of suffering and pain used to convey the exilic life have striking similarity with themes in the immigration *corridos*. When the *corridos* are seen in light of the poetry of Second Isaiah, the biblical text lends an authoritative voice to the exploited and anguished experiences presented in the Mexican immigrant *corridos*. It can be argued that the rhetorical situation within Second Isaiah calls for such a reading. In turn, contemporary imagery in the *corridos* greatly increases our understanding of exile in Second Isaiah. The immigrant *corridos* are what Ruben calls the “Mexican narrative of exile.”³⁷⁷ Even outside the realms of biblical scholarship, drawing connections between the Babylonian exile and the Mexican immigrant experience will still be drawn. This is evident in migrant *corrido*,

³⁷⁵ Chew-Sanchez, “Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora in the United States,” 146.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 199.

³⁷⁷ Martinez, *The New Americans*, 180.

Clandestino, in which the immigrant's U.S. destination point is referred to as *la grande Babylon*:

Solo voy con mi pena	I travel alone with my woe
Sola va mi condena	My punishment travels alone
Correr es mi destino	My destiny is to be on the run
Para burlar la ley	And make fools of the cops
Perdido en el corazon	Lost in the heart
De la grande Babylon	Of a huge Babylon
Me dicen el clandestine	They call me the clandestine one
Por no llevar papel . . .	Because I do'not have any papers. ³⁷⁸

³⁷⁸ Martinez, *The New Americans*, 180.

Chapter Five

The Return in Second Isaiah and the Mexican Migratory Experience

In analyzing Second Isaiah's major thematic thrust, one may be inclined to use the various form-critical approaches that have dominated Isaiah research.³⁷⁹ In the analysis of its form, the poetry of Second Isaiah has been presented as being comprised of a series of sporadic oracles, artificially placed together without a clear reference to a sociopolitical context.³⁸⁰ Yet in contrast to this, Muilenburg insists that the poetry of Second Isaiah is deservedly unique and contains a discernible progress of thought that is often overlooked by traditional form critics.³⁸¹ Yehoshua Gitay similarly argues that "the stylistic efforts of addresses in Isaiah are designed

³⁷⁹ Eugene H. Merrill, "Survey of a Century of Studies on Isaiah 40-55," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 573 (1987): 34; Hugo Gressmann, "Die literarische Analyse Deuterocesajas," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 34 (1914): 254-97; Sigmund Mowinckel, "Die Komposition de deuterocesajanischen Buches," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 49 (1931): 87-112, 242-60; Joachim Begrich, "Studien zu Deuterocesaja," *Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament* 77 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1938); Eva Hessler, *Gott der Schöpfer: Ein Beitrag zur Komposition und Theologie Deuterocesajas*, (Germany: Greifswald, 1961); Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, trans. David M.G. Stalker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969); Roy F. Melugin, *The Formation of Isaiah 40-55* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1976).

³⁸⁰ Yehoshua Gitay, "Prophetic Criticism-'What Are They Doing?': The Case of Isaiah-A Methodological Assessment," *JSOT* 96(2001): 122-23.

³⁸¹ Merrill, "Survey of a Century," 34-36.

to anchor the speeches in a certain historical [or sociopolitical] context.”³⁸² It is evident--even from a leisurely reading of the text-- that the poetry of Second Isaiah revolves around centralized themes that orient audiences toward a specific sociopolitical context.³⁸³

In terms of a text’s context, Gitay reminds us that, “A text that is isolated from its context is meaningless,” which is also an idea that resonates with the reading strategy of diasporic theology.³⁸⁴ From a diasporic theological perspective, all texts including the biblical text are contextual products.³⁸⁵ Applied to Second Isaiah, this concept of text represents a distinct cultural product that actively responds to a particular question posed by the context of exile in Babylon.³⁸⁶ From a diasporic theological perspective, complete discovery of this exilic context is the result of the reader acknowledging, valuing, and analyzing the sociopolitical context of Second Isaiah.³⁸⁷

³⁸² Gitay, “Prophetic Criticism,” 116.

³⁸³ Philip R. Davies following statement bares mentioning, “The most explicit historical references in Isaiah 40-55, viz, the naming of Cyrus in 44.28 and 45.1-7. “God of Cyrus, God of Israel: Some Religio-Historical Reflections of Isaiah 40-55,” in *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F.A. Sawyer* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 207-08; *See also* Alberzt, *Israel in Exile*, 105.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

³⁸⁵ Segovia, “Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora,” 67-69.

³⁸⁶ Boer, “Deutero-Isaiah,” 195.

³⁸⁷ Segovia, “Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora,” 67-69.

In the previous chapter, we saw that the primary concern for Second Isaiah was providing the Judean community with a divine response to the Babylonian exile. Second Isaiah's response to the Babylonian exile takes shape through the use of thought provoking imagery. It is through imagery that the prophet/poet develops his dominant theme involving the imminent return of the Judean exilic community to Zion/Jerusalem.³⁸⁸ In the course of Second Isaiah's poetry, the darker images of exile progressively function to exhort the Judean exilic community to desire a return to their homeland.³⁸⁹ And indeed, Second Isaiah's poetic development of a vision of exile sought to challenge a reluctant and somewhat fractured community to engage once again in politics so that they might return to the remote Judean highlands.³⁹⁰

In the poetry of Second Isaiah, the prophet/poet develops a thematic progression of exile-return that is imbued with a visual dynamic. The cognitive range of exile and return is extended beyond their generic meanings, giving them visual depth that not only prompts the imagination but also stirs the heart.³⁹¹ In Muilenburg's words,

³⁸⁸ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 95.

³⁸⁹ Boer, "Deutero-Isaiah," 182.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 199.

³⁹¹ The view that exile and return are creatively portrayed throughout Second Isaiah coincides with the views of numerous Isaiah studies. Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 90-130; Meindert Dijkstra, "YHWH as Israel's *gō'ēl* : Second Isaiah's Perspective on Reconciliation and Restitution," *Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 5 (1999): 236-257; Antje Labahn, "The Delay of Salvation within Deutero-Isaiah," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 85 (1999): 71-84; Ann Johnston, "A Prophetic Vision of an Alternative

“The most revealing feature of the poet’s style is his use of imagery. . . . The theology of exile and return is articulated in many pictures and comparisons.”³⁹²

Second Isaiah’s rhetorical use of images portrays an alternative world in which exile does not have the last word.³⁹³ His multi-textured imagery is grounded in traditional Israelite narratives, causing his vision of exile to bring about a hope of return. John Goldingay comments on this rhetorical force of Second Isaiah’s imagery:

An escalating crescendo is created as exuberant sequences of such poetry surge relentlessly to their climax, sweeping along their audience and overwhelming resistance by their force, power and drive. The metaphors, the similes, and the symbols appeal to the imagination. All these things combine to generate insight (not merely to ornament insight gained by some other route) in such a way as bypasses analytic, linear reason and the skepticism which asks, “But is it really so?”³⁹⁴

Community: A Reading of Isaiah 40-55,” In *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in Memory of H. Neil Richardson*, ed. H Neil Richardson and Lewis M Hopfe (Winona Lake, Ind. : Eisenbrauns 1994), 31-40; Dille, “Honor Restored: Honor, Shame and God,” 232-250; Meira Polliack, “Deutero-Isaiah’s Typological use of Jacob in the Portrayal of Israel’s National Renewal,” in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Reventlow Henning and Yair Hoffman (New York : Sheffield Academic Press, 2002 72-110; John I. Durham, “ Isaiah 40-55: A New Creation, A New Exodus, A New Messiah,” In *The Yahweh/Baal Confrontation and Other Studies in Biblical Literature and Archaeology: Essays in Honour of Emmett Willard Hamrick*, ed. Emmett Willard Hamrick and Julia M. O'Brien (Lewiston : Mellen Biblical Press, 1995), 47-56.

³⁹² Muilenburg, “The Book of Isaiah,” 388.

³⁹³ John Goldingay, “Isaiah 40-55 in the 1990s, Among other Things, Deconstructing, Mystifying, Intertextual, Socio-Critical, and Hearer-Involving,” *Biblical Interpretation* 5 (1997): 227.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

The insight generated through Second Isaiah's imagery is that through divine power a return to Zion/Jerusalem is imminent. What appears true in Second Isaiah is that the departure from captivity does not simply involve a return from exile or the reestablishment of political autonomy but a blossoming of the desert, a straightening of all that is crooked.³⁹⁵ Brueggemann infers that the return is vividly imagined in a manner that was not available apart from Second Isaiah's poetry.³⁹⁶

Second Isaiah's choice of images intensifies the exile-return progression through a sequence of dramatic scenes--culminating in a real return of the Judean exilic community (Is 55).³⁹⁷ The prophet/poet's symbolic display conveys the concept of the return with strong expressive force, and brings it into an actual historical event. He adroitly incorporates early Israelite traditions and transforms their superficial opaqueness into transparent meaningfulness. As Richard Clifford also suggests, "the prophet has fused the Exodus-Conquest and the cosmogonic version of the account of Israel's origin and, as corollary, the "new event" of a new Exodus-Conquest and new cosmogony."³⁹⁸ The traditions of Creation, the patriarchal stories, and the Exodus-Conquest serve as the prophet/poet's palette for constructing a cogent image of return. In his study of Second Isaiah, Bernhard Anderson states, "Second Isaiah's eschatological hope is shaped by images drawn

³⁹⁵ Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 190.

³⁹⁶ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 96.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 185-86, 90.

³⁹⁸ Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading*, 19-21.

from Israel's *Heilsgeschichte*, particularly the crucial event of the Exodus, from which flow consequences reaching into the present and on into the future."³⁹⁹ The future imagined by Second Isaiah is one that highlights the divine acts in the exiles' ancestral past, empowering them to meet a present crisis, which can only be done through the renewal of their imagination. Bruggemann writes, "The poet appeals to the old memories and affirmations in an astonishing way to jar the perceptual field of Israel and to cause a wholly new discernment of reality."⁴⁰⁰ He continues:

The poetry is not aimed first of all at external conduct, as though the poet expected people immediately to start packing for travel. Rather, the poetry cuts underneath behavior to begin to transform the self-image, communal image, and image of historical possibility. The rhetoric works to deabsolutize imperial modes of reality, so that fresh forms of communal possibility can be entertained.⁴⁰¹

Through poignant imagery, Second Isaiah draws together cultural images and symbols to bring about a vanquishing Babylon and allow the exiles to return home. As Gottwald states, "The forthcoming deliverance is enacted in the imagination of discourse between author and audience, and the very discourse itself will assist in bringing the events to pass because the word of Yahweh is effectual through this speaker and in this audience."⁴⁰² In other words, the sole essence of Second Isaiah's imaging scheme is the saving event proper, which is the departure of the exiles

³⁹⁹ "Exodus Typology in Second Isaiah," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. Bernard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), 194.

⁴⁰⁰ Bruggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 96.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁰² Gottwald, "Social Class and Ideology in Isaiah 40-55," 50.

from Babylonian oppression and their return home, and the advent of YHWH himself, who is to accompany his people.⁴⁰³

Foregrounding Second Isaiah's return-oriented imagery does however require a methodology that is sensitive to the nuances of this poetry's artistic style and sociopolitical context.⁴⁰⁴ Within a diasporic theological orientation, any variety of literary and sociocultural methodologies may be used as long as they allow one to bring to the fore the literary, rhetorical, and ideological aspects in the text as a basis for promoting the marginalized voice of both the ancient and contemporary people.⁴⁰⁵ One approach that demonstrates great promise in foregrounding these aspects that are behind Second Isaiah's return-oriented imagery is a rhetorical reading of the biblical text.⁴⁰⁶ In Gitay's words, "The purpose of a rhetorical reading is to unveil the situation that gave birth to the discourse, and to shed light on the choice of its forms as a response to the situation."⁴⁰⁷ In response to a rhetorical analysis of biblical texts, Brueggemann reminds us: "The intentional

⁴⁰³ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions*, vol. 2, trans D.M.G. Stalker (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1965), 244.

⁴⁰⁴ Segovia, "Toward A Hermeneutics of the Diaspora," 69.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ In her recent study of Second Isaiah, Dille remarks that "increasing interest in the rhetoric of the text has led to a greater appreciation over the past ten to fifteen years of the importance of understanding metaphor in Hebrew Bible." *Mixing Metaphors*, 3. She rightfully states that Muilenburg is credited with the rise of rhetorical criticism in Hebrew Bible studies, particularly with his commentary on Second Isaiah.

⁴⁰⁷ Gitay, "Prophetic Criticism," 117.

embrace of rhetorical criticism seems to me especially important in a situation of a decentered community.”⁴⁰⁸ In other words, it is rhetorical criticism’s attention to detail in the text that makes it suitable for the voice of socially marginalized groups to emerge. During its inception with James Muilenburg, rhetorical criticism read texts in ways that paid careful attention to detailed rhetorical matters that marked turns and accents.⁴⁰⁹ This allowed users to gain insights about the concreteness and artistry of the text.

Rhetorical criticism’s attention to detail is fully compatible with a diasporic theological perspective. For it is in the details of the text that one discovers its literary, rhetorical, and ideological aspects. Moreover, by foregrounding these details in Second Isaiah, one is able to see the subversive identity of the prophet/poet’s message of return, which, in turn, makes a way for the broader context of the Mexican immigrant experience and its vision of return in the *corridos* to enter into the discussion. The fusion of the textual specificity of rhetorical criticism with the theoretical interpretive categories of diaspora theology provides a basis for understanding both ancient and contemporary diasporic experiences. A rhetorical reading within the parameters of diaspora theology enables the return-oriented imagery in Second Isaiah to become a tool for understanding the Mexican immigrant’s hope of return. Diaspora theology is able

⁴⁰⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 58.

⁴⁰⁹ James Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 1-18.

to render the details found in Second Isaiah and to make them useful for a broader dialogue with contemporary diasporic groups, such as the Mexican immigrant community. Although rhetorical criticism is exceedingly efficient in highlighting Second Isaiah's poetic artistry, diaspora theology takes this even further by allowing non-biblical texts such as the *corridos* about immigration to inform our understanding of the biblical text. In other words, rhetorical criticism alone lacks the theoretical categories to see beyond the biblical text to non-biblical texts, especially those that come from oppressed and subjugated groups. Nevertheless, rhetorical criticism as a point of access into the alternative world of the text takes texts seriously in all of their particularity, without grand historical or grand dogmatic claims.⁴¹⁰ It is in the particularity of the text that one discovers the various nuances to Second Isaiah's return-oriented imagery; however, it is through diaspora theology that the Mexican immigrant *corridos* become equally important in our understanding of return.

In the context of the Mexican immigrant experience, the *corridos* serve as useful cultural expressions for understanding the theme of return.⁴¹¹ Chew-Sanchez states that "the *corridor*" is identified as an important Mexican popular cultural form that emerges as an expression of oppositional culture due to its message of resistance,

⁴¹⁰ Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home*, 61.

⁴¹¹ Chew-Sanchez states that "a large number of the *corridos* that describe the immigrant experience provides a unique opportunity to analyze the Mexican diaspora phenomenon." "Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora in the United States," 4.

empowerment and social critique.”⁴¹² This oppositional nature of Mexican immigrant *corridos* enables migrants to be dynamic dialogue partners with the return-oriented texts in Second Isaiah. In other words, through the *corridos* about the Mexican immigrant experience, one is able to see that Second Isaiah is also a form of oppositional culture, serving as a sharp critique of the imperial system.⁴¹³ By engaging with the immigrant *corridos*, one begins to understand Second Isaiah’s rhetorical strategy as also being a product of a subordinate group and the vision of return encoded in the prophet/poet’s message as representing a form of resistance and rebellion to the Babylonian social order.⁴¹⁴ The resistance inherent in the *corridos* is the product of a subordinate group about which Chew-Sanchez argues, “These groups develop an oppositional culture or a culture of resistance that embodies a coherent set of values, beliefs, and practices that mitigates the effects of oppression and reaffirms that which is distinct from the dominant culture.”⁴¹⁵

⁴¹² Chew-Sanchez, “Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora in the United States,” 11.

⁴¹³ In different words, Bruggemann has identified this aspect of Second Isaiah, which he classifies as “the work of poetic imagination.” He states that “the work of poetic imagination holds the potential of unleashing a community of power and action that finally will not be contained by any imperial restrictions and definitions of reality.” *Hopeful Imagination*, 96. The argument I am making is that the *corridos* about the Mexican immigrant experience unlock the understanding of this “poetic imagination” even further.

⁴¹⁴ Chew-Sanchez considers this to be the essential character of the Mexican immigrant *corridos* (poetry/lyric of resistance). “Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora in the United States,” 24.

⁴¹⁵ Chew-Sanchez, “Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora in the United States,” 27.

Therefore, both the poetry of Second Isaiah and the poetic lyrics of Mexican immigrant *corridos* represent powerful tools for dealing with the oppressive forces of the empire.⁴¹⁶

The hope of returning to Mexico is a recurring image in various *corridos* about the Mexican immigrant experience. The prominence of this hope of return is evident in the *corridos*' romanticized view of Mexico, which is typically portrayed as a place of security, tenderness, support, love, and family.⁴¹⁷ Chew-Sanchez writes,

The landscape of the hometowns of the migrants is also greatly romanticized and described in detail. The solitude, working conditions, lack of social basic benefits, labor exploitation, persecution and other elements common in the Mexican diaspora, and other diasporic communities, particularly those who are undocumented, generates longing for a hometown and, at same time, a utopian construction and reconstruction of the hometown and the social relations in their countries of origin.

By imagining their homeland, Mexican immigrants reaffirm their ethnic identity, which likewise arguably appears to be the poetic aim of Second Isaiah and his return-oriented imagery. In both the Mexican immigrant *corridos* and the poetry of Second Isaiah, the theme of return projects images of homeland that become a source of celebration, ethnic pride, and hope for their respective communities.

Within the theoretical framework of diaspora theology, one is given broad creative space to understand the various aspects of the diasporic experience, such the issue of return. Given its openness to various methodological approaches, a

⁴¹⁶ Herrera-Sobek, "Corridos and Canciones," 103.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 201.

rhetorical reading strategy holds enormous potential to unlock the theme of return embodied and encoded in the poetry of Second Isaiah and *corridos* about the Mexican immigrant experience.

Imagining Return in the Poetry of Second Isaiah

The richness of imagery and vision in Second Isaiah undoubtedly paints a picture of exile that seeks to draw the displaced Judean community toward the idea of return. Yet even apart from this imagery, the theme of return is clearly apparent. For example, Isaiah 48: 20, urges, “Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it forth to the end of the earth; say, "The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!" This call to leave Babylon is repeated in Is 49:9 and 52:11. This theme can also be seen in the prophet/poet’s various descriptions of the return journey and what it entails (cf. Is 49:22-23, 51:11, and 52:12). In fact, it is here, in the planning and in the prophet/poet’s aim to recover a distinct cultural identity among the Judean exilic community and its descendents that the idea of return truly takes shape. In the details of Second Isaiah’s poetry one finds unmistakable hints of the underlying exile, which, in turn, are to be taken for the return.⁴¹⁸ One of Second Isaiah’s principle ways of carrying forward this recovery of identity is to focus the exile community toward home by using language of family--Jacob/Israel, YHWH as husband, and Zion/Jerusalem as

⁴¹⁸ Muilenburg, “The Book of Isaiah,” 460.

mother.⁴¹⁹ In other words, along with his call to leave Babylon, the prophet/poet urges the Judean exilic community and their descendents to embrace their ancestral cultural heritage. This latter aspect likely elicits the greatest response.

Within the context of an oppressive Babylonian empire, Second Isaiah sought to counter a waning hope with a multi-textured image of return that was grounded in early Israelite tradition. Commenting on Second Isaiah's return-orient imagery, Richard Clifford writes the following:

The impression given is that to move back to Zion is to take part in creation and to remain in Babylon is to yield to domination of chaotic, anti-community forces. The prophet, eager to lead his people, puts before them the fundamental choice—to remain or to move.⁴²⁰

In convincing the exilic community to choose the latter, Second Isaiah takes up pre-exilic Israelite traditions such as Zion theology, exodus motifs and psalm traditions and develops a new future expectation from them.⁴²¹ By incorporating these celebrated traditions into the prophet/poet's image of return, he is able to contradict a situation of hopelessness—something that cannot be done by inventing new images. What makes Second Isaiah's image of return so palpable for his despondent audience is that it is an idea continuous with Israel's past. Second Isaiah draws upon the exile community's deepest memories and rekindles those

⁴¹⁹ Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 176; For further readings on the language of family in the Hebrew Bible, see Leo G. Perdue, Joseph Blenkinsopp, John J. Collins, and Carol Meyers, eds., *Families in Ancient Israel: The Family, Religion, and Culture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

⁴²⁰ Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading*, 99.

⁴²¹ Labahn, "The Delay of Salvation," 72.

very emotions and values that have always been the basis for contradicting the imperially imposed self-definition.⁴²² Ann Johnston aptly remarks, “The message has the power to stir a community out of its lethargy and inertia and carry it across a desert in a new exodus in the birth of an alternative community.”⁴²³

In integrating Israel’s past into Second Isaiah’s message of return, there emerges a sequence of spectacular images of return--of a miraculous journey or a transfigured peregrination (48:20; 51:14; 52:11-12; 55:12).⁴²⁴ Among these emerging images of return, three are most prevalent in Second Isaiah: transformation of nature, new exodus, and family reunion.

Transformation of Nature

In the poetry of Second Isaiah, the image of return incorporates elements of Israel’s past cosmogony in which YHWH is seen taming or transforming various chaotic elements in nature in order to make a safe pathway for the exiles to return to Zion/Jerusalem. Muilenburg identifies this transformation of nature as a central feature of Second Isaiah’s theme of return (43: 18-21; 48:21; 49:9-11; 55:13), and suggests that it is grounded in the cosmological theology of creation faith.⁴²⁵ One such recurring image is of YHWH breaking the power of the desert by making

⁴²² Blaidell, “Speak to the Heart of Jerusalem,” 58.

⁴²³ Johnston, “A Prophetic Vision,” 34.

⁴²⁴ Schökel, “Isaiah,” 176.

⁴²⁵ Muilenburg, “The Book of Isaiah,” 459.

away through it.⁴²⁶ For example, in Isaiah 40: 3-5, Second Isaiah sets the scene for a return image with a hostile and barren desert falling prey to the transforming powers of YHWH, the Creator:

A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Here, "A voice speaks, authorizing a superhighway across the desert between Babylon and Jerusalem for an easy, triumphant, dazzling return home" comments Brueggemann.⁴²⁷ The hostile terrain of the desert is transformed into a passageway offering a road that leads homeward. The frequency of Second Isaiah's mentions of the *דֶּרֶךְ יְהוָה* (the way of the Lord) (40:3; 42:16, 19; 48:17; 49:11; 51:10) and the return (vv. 40:10-11; 41:18-19; 42:6; 43:19-20; 48:21; 49:9 ff; 55:12-13) deliberately reiterate this.⁴²⁸ This "way of the Lord," which eliminates valleys,

⁴²⁶ Clifford indicates that the Second Isaiah's message to the exiles incorporated a national story, which consisted of two ideal types, one "historic" and the other "cosmogonic." He states, "the cosmogonic version, in which Yahweh battles directly sea or desert (infertility) and leads the people out of the grasp of these hostile forces to his sacred precincts, is represented (adapted of course to Israelite monotheism) in such old traditions as Exodus 15; Deuteronomy 32:7-14; Psalms 74: 12-17; 77: 12-20; 89:5-37: 114)." *Fair Spoken and Persuading*, 18, 62.

⁴²⁷ Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 18.

⁴²⁸ Muilenburg, "The Book of Isaiah," 426.

mountains and hills, and all the steep and rough places, contrasts with the waterless place that is the desert, disarming its terror and threat.⁴²⁹

YHWH, the Creator, continues this transformation of the hostile desert terrain by causing water to spring forth in the desert for the returning exiles: “I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys (Is 41:18).” As Alonso- Schökel writes, “A potentially exhausting march through the desert is converted into a joyous procession, with water abounding in the wilderness.”⁴³⁰

The life of each exilic traveler is sure to be sustained, even while traversing the hostile desert. Their return journey will not lack life sustaining liquids.

Furthermore, YHWH will also transform the desert into a producer of nourishing vegetation: “I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive; I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together (v.19).”

These specific trees not only provide the exiles with some nourishment (i.e. “the olive”) they also are useful for the re-building efforts in Zion/Jerusalem.⁴³¹ Charles Blaidell writes, “Water will be found in places where water would seem

⁴²⁹ Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading*, 75.

⁴³⁰ Schökel, “Isaiah,” 177.

⁴³¹ אֲרֶז (Cedar)- outward power was used for building the Temple (Ez 3:7); שִׁטָּה (acacia)- wood used to make the ark, altars, (Ex 25:5,10,13, 19); וְהָרֵם (myrtle)- adorn the tents for the feast of booths (Neh 8:15); שֶׁמֶן (Oil Tree)- anointing the king, priests, Tabernacle, altar, utensils (Ex 30:23, Ex 29:7); בְּרוֹשׁ (Fir tree)- durable and large used for musical instruments (2 Sam 6:5); Pine- used for building; Box tree- used for building, see Ludwig Köhler, Walter Baumgartner, Johann Jakob Stamm, and M E J Richardson, eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Boston : Brill, 2001).

impossible, on mountaintops, and where the apparently barren is watered, fertility erupts; from the watered wilderness shall come “the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle and the olive” (41:19).⁴³² Thus the very elements that make travel through the desert impossible—the hostile terrain, lack of water and food—are to be utterly transformed.⁴³³ As if this were not enough, the people are assured in a final gesture that YHWH’s transformation of the desert pathway will be so complete as to allow even the blind to return safely to Zion/Jerusalem:

I will lead the blind by a road they do not know; by paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them. (Is 42:16)

In this passage, YHWH transforming the rough places into level ground echoes the image seen in Is 40:4, “the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.” This repeated image not only reiterates the ease the return will be for the Judean exilic community, it weaves together Second Isaiah’s image of return into a cohesive theme.

Another image in this fabric of return is that of YHWH supplying water and trees in the desert. In Isaiah 43:20b and 44:3, the people are assured that water will issue forth from what was apparently barren. It seems that the “highway” (40:3)

⁴³² Charles R. Blaidell, “Speak to the Heart of Jerusalem: The ‘Conversational’ Structure of Deutero-Isaiah,” *Encounter* 51(1991): 55.

⁴³³ Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading*, 75.

will have frequent “rest stops” with drinking fountains all along the way (49:10).⁴³⁴ YHWH’s favor now enables them to “cross through waters,” to “walk through fire” (43:2). In Isaiah 55:12-13, YHWH transforms unpleasant brush into useful trees, enabling the people to return to Zion:

For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

In this passage, Second Isaiah exhorts the exiles to join a miraculously guided procession through the transformed desert. These images of nature being transformed stem from Israel’s most distant past, a creation image. YHWH, the Creator, tames the intractable forces that had made the return to Zion/Jerusalem impossible. The hostile desert that stands between the exiles and their home is broken by the making of a road through it.⁴³⁵ In the end, to come to Zion/Jerusalem is to go out of Babylon.

The New Exodus

In developing a description of return, many scholars have observed that Second Isaiah incorporates images from the Exodus tradition, some going so far as to call it a new exodus. Typical exodus events such as the road of the Exodus, the journey

⁴³⁴ Thomas W. Mann, “Stars, Sprouts, and Streams: The Creative Redeemer of Second Isaiah,” in *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner*, ed. William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 146.

⁴³⁵ Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading*, 66.

through the wilderness to Sinai, and from Sinai to Palestine have been interwoven into the prophet/poet's image of return.⁴³⁶ Second Isaiah uses the Exodus tradition to formulate a new exodus for the exilic community's future, which involves liberation from Babylon and return to Zion/Jerusalem. In the end, the prophet/poet relies on Exodus traditions as a model for constructing a compelling image of return.⁴³⁷

The Exodus had always maintained a dominant place in the historical and theological memory of the community, which recalled the actions of YHWH on their behalf.⁴³⁸ Leo Perdue states the importance of the Exodus event thus: "Exodus liberation became the fundamental faith of the community and led Israel to remember its experience as oppressed sojourners, resident aliens, and slaves in Egypt (Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Deut. 10:19; 23:7)."⁴³⁹ For the Exodus is understood as a political act by which Yahweh liberated his people.⁴⁴⁰ The clearest demonstration of Second Isaiah's use of the Exodus tradition in constructing his image of return is in Isaiah 43. Throughout chapter 43, the prophet/poet refers both to ancient Israel's liberation from Egypt and their journey through the wilderness to the land of milk

⁴³⁶ Muilenburg, "The Book of Isaiah," 495.

⁴³⁷ Polliack, "Deutero-Isaiah's Typological use of Jacob," 80.

⁴³⁸ Durham, "Isaiah 40-55: A New Creation," 52.

⁴³⁹ "The Israelite and Early Jewish Family: Summary and Conclusion," in *Families in Ancient Israel Family, Religion, and Culture*, ed Perdue et al. (Louisville, Ky. Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 239.

⁴⁴⁰ Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 156.

and honey, which, in turn, frames Second Isaiah's conception of the exiles' return to Zion/Jerusalem. Resonance with the Exodus tradition can be seen in vv. 15-17:

I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King. Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick.

This passage first begins with an emphasis on God's sovereignty- "your King," which is a major motif of the poems (40:10b; 41:21; 43:15). Subversively, this introduction suggests that it is YHWH who is responsible for the welfare and protection of the exilic community, and not the Babylonian empire.⁴⁴¹ After this introduction, there follows a series of allusions to Israel's exodus from Egypt, in particular to the climactic confrontation with Pharaoh at the sea.⁴⁴² Two features in the Exodus tradition are emphasized; the highway that YHWH made in the sea, and the destruction of the Egyptian pursuers.⁴⁴³ Ultimately, the relevance of these features is to convince the Judean exilic community that neither the hostile desert nor their pursuing enemies will prevent them from returning to Zion/Jerusalem.

By incorporating the Exodus tradition into Second Isaiah's image of return, the prophet/poet also develops a contrast between the Exodus event and the exilic experience. In vv. 18-19, the returning exiles are assured they will not suffer the same hardships endured in the desert wanderings:

⁴⁴¹ Muilenburg, "The Book of Isaiah," 493.

⁴⁴² Mann, "Stars, Sprouts, and Streams," 144.

⁴⁴³ Muilenburg, "The Book of Isaiah," 494.

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert. (Isaiah 43:18-20)

From a “way in the sea” (v. 16a) the text now turns to “a way in the wilderness” (v. 19b). In these verses, the epochal event of the Exodus becomes useful in that is distinguished from a more decisive and redemptive event in the future.⁴⁴⁴ This event represents a new exodus, which the Lord unfolds in the desert between Babylon and Jerusalem. In the new exodus, a way is made through the hostile desert for the exiles to return to Zion/Jerusalem.⁴⁴⁵ For Second Isaiah the way through the wilderness is the “way” (cf. Is 40:3) that leads from Babylon through the desert to Jerusalem.⁴⁴⁶ The desert—a place normally without water—is the place where Yahweh will “give drink to my chosen people (v.20).” Verse 20 looks back to the miracles of YHWH in Exodus 17:1-6: “They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he split open the rock and the water gushed out.” The returning exiles are assured of gushing, life-giving waters on the way.⁴⁴⁷ Yet different from the Exodus event, the exiles will return to Zion/Jerusalem with ease. In Isaiah 52:12, the journey into the desert

⁴⁴⁴ Muilenburg, “The Book of Isaiah,” 495.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 496.

⁴⁴⁶ Mann, “Stars, Sprouts, and Streams,” 146.

⁴⁴⁷ Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 108.

is not to be repeated with the return: “For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight; for the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.”

Using the old, sacred images of the redemptive, creative Exodus-act, Second Isaiah pictures the return as a revitalized event embodying a new exodus.⁴⁴⁸ Drawing from the Exodus tradition, he creates a richly complex interweaving of water images -“a way in the sea” and “mighty waters” refer to the new exodus; “quenched” implies water; “rivers in the desert,” “water in the wilderness,” and “to give drink” in alluding to the wanderings in an arid wilderness. The old Exodus memory is reiterated, yet it also stands in contrast to the “new thing” that is the exiles’ return to Zion/Jerusalem. Though this “new thing” is likened to the wilderness sojourn from Egypt, it is certain to be much more miraculous. In using it as a point of contrast, the new exodus lends itself to a higher degree of believability—allowing it to engage the imagination of the Judean exilic community and leading them to actuate a return to Zion/Jerusalem.

Reunited Family

In constructing a compelling image of return, Second Isaiah uses a language of family, which, in light of family separation caused by the exile, would have been extremely powerful in reorienting the exiles toward Zion/Jerusalem. Arguably, this language becomes useful for the prophet/poet, because it is suggestive of a core

⁴⁴⁸ Johnston, “A Prophetic Vision,” 36.

value in early Israelite tradition, family unity. Carol Meyers suggests that the family unit lies at the center of early Israelite worldview:

In premodern agrarian settings such as early Israel, therefore, individualistic elements of human existence, including a person's range of psychological processes and feeling states, were characteristically subordinate to the person's role in the family unit. . . . A person was not an autonomous entity but someone's father, mother, daughter, son, grandparent, and so forth.⁴⁴⁹

In the poetry of Second Isaiah, specifically in his personification of Zion/Jerusalem, the prophet/poet appears to have in mind early Israel's collective family identity in developing a compelling image of return. From Perdue's perspective, the exile may have diminished ideas of a collective family identity but not eliminated them:

Even the development of the concept of individual responsibility, occasioned by the undermining of family traditions by the monarchy and by the disruptions of conquest, exile, and return, did not suppress this prevailing sense of community.⁴⁵⁰

In the poetry of Second Isaiah, the extensive allusions to the image of family solidarity would have had enormous effect in persuading a despondent Judean community to return home. The prophet/poet's message is given cultural weight by incorporating an Israelite tradition of household into the return-oriented message, which, in turn, offers the chance for the continuity of older households and the formation of new ones. This ingenious rhetorical strategy takes hold of what had

⁴⁴⁹ Carol Meyers, "The Family in Early Israel," in *Families in Ancient Israel: Family, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Perdue et al. (Louisville, Ky. Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 22.

⁴⁵⁰ "The Israelite and the Early Jewish Family," 167.

long been considered the primary and essential cosmos for human dwelling in early Israelite history--family unity.⁴⁵¹

In depicting return in terms of family unity, Second Isaiah proclaims the reversal of personified Zion/Jerusalem's shameful condition, which is portrayed in her lack of a husband (signifying her abandonment by God), childlessness, and her destruction as a city (Is 49:17, 19).⁴⁵² During the exile, Zion/Jerusalem is a 'widow', bereaved of her children, abandoned by her husband, and treated shamefully by her enemies (40:1-11; 49:13-50:3; 51:17-20; and 54:1-14).⁴⁵³ As discussed in the previous chapter, these images of Zion/Jerusalem as mother and wife entice the emotions, which makes the return not a simple journey but a family emergency.

As wife and mother, Zion/Jerusalem commands personal attention from her immediate family members, the Judean exiles and their descendents. In other words, the prophet/poet communicates Zion/Jerusalem's connectedness to her husband and her children in such a way that makes the exiles return a family reunion. With this in mind, the return is to become a lighthearted journey (49: 13): "Lo, these shall come from far away (v.12), . . . Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing!" (v. 13). These texts use the idea of a family reunion to announce the joyous return of Zion/Jerusalem's and YHWH's

⁴⁵¹ Perdue, "The Israelite and the Early Jewish Family," 179.

⁴⁵² Dille, "Honor Restored: Honor, Shame and God," 244.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 242.

sons and daughters. Buoyed by the prospect of this family being reunited, the exiles are certain to return in a joyous procession. First, Zion/Jerusalem, the wife, reunites with her husband, YHWH, “See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me (49:16).” As a mother, her children will be gathered to her, “Lift up your eyes all around and see; they all gather, they come to you. As I live, says the Lord, you shall put all of them on like an ornament, and like a bride you shall bind them on (49:18).” For Second Isaiah, the return is more than a journey through the desert; it is the coming together of a wife with her husband and a mother with her children. So many of her children will gather that she will not have room for them all “. . . surely now you will be too crowded for your inhabitants. . . The children born in the time of your bereavement will yet say in your hearing: ‘The place is too crowded for me; make room for me to settle (Is 49:19-20).’” Even the nations will be involved in making this family reunion a success, “Thus says the Lord God: I will soon lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders (Is 49:22).” The earth’s mighty rulers serve as child-care providers and wet nurses for Zion/Jerusalem’s little ones. These texts not only depict the returning exiles as Zion/Jerusalem’s offspring, but also heighten the scenario’s impact by depicting them as little children—vulnerable, innocent infants and toddlers who must be carried.⁴⁵⁴ This image of the exiles as children continues in Isaiah 50:1 in which the people of Israel appear as

⁴⁵⁴ Darr, *Isaiah’s Vision*, 53.

the children of their father, Yahweh, and their mother, Zion/Jerusalem.⁴⁵⁵ In Isaiah 50:1, YHWH, the father, directs a rhetorical question to his children, “Where is your mother’s bill of divorce with which I put her away?” His question implies that no such document exists and that the family is still to be viewed as fully intact. In other word, YHWH, the husband, may have been absent, but he has not divorced Zion/Jerusalem. He has not severed the relationship.⁴⁵⁶ YHWH’s assurance of family unity gives legitimacy to the exiles that they can return to their waiting mother Zion/Jerusalem. This assurance translates into a return portrayed by a solemn and yet joyous procession of YHWH’s redeemed to Zion/Jerusalem in Is 51:11: “So the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; . . . and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”⁴⁵⁷ Second Isaiah prays for the exiles’ return, for roads to be filled with celebration (51:11). Once, pursuers overtook Zion/Jerusalem, but now the poet prays that joy and gladness overtake those returning. The once abandoned, deserted woman Zion/Jerusalem will have a husband, “For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like the wife of a man’s youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great

⁴⁵⁵ Darr, *Isaiah’s Vision*, 65.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Eugene H. Merrill, “Pilgrimage and Procession: Motifs of Israel’s Return,” in *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 270. Merrill states that modern interpreters of Second Isaiah must look not only to exodus contexts for their meaning, but to pilgrimage and procession as themes of Israel’s return.

compassion I will gather you (Is 54:6-7).” Zion/Jerusalem was a woman ‘cast off’ and ‘abandoned’ (vv. 6-7), from whom YHWH had hidden his face (v.8), but Zion’s shameful conditions of childlessness and loss of husband are reversed, bountifully!⁴⁵⁸ Zion will no longer suffer rebuke (v. 9). She shall be given emblems of honor—sapphires, rubies, jewels, etc. (vv. 11-12).⁴⁵⁹ These multiple references to family unity reiterate the image of return Second Isaiah hoped his audience would envision.⁴⁶⁰

Vision of Return in Second Isaiah and Mexican Immigrant *Corridos*

The yearning to return to Mexico is an essential element in the Mexican immigrant experience. From 1965 to 1985, immigration specialists Douglas S. Massey and Audrey Singer have estimated that 26.7 million undocumented Mexican migrants entered the United States, but that these entries were offset by 21.8 million returnees, yielding a net increase of just 4.9 million over a twenty-year period.⁴⁶¹ Recent statistics indicate that thirty years after settling in the United States, 67 percent of settled migrants can be expected to have returned to Mexico.

⁴⁵⁸ Dille, “Honor Restored: Honor, Shame and God,” 246.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁴⁶⁰ Richtsje Abma, “Traveling from Babylon to Zion: Location and its Function in Isaiah 49-55,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 74 (1997): 6.

⁴⁶¹ Massey, *Beyond Smoke*, 64.

Though the reasons for returning to Mexico may vary, migration studies have identified two prevailing reasons. First, many Mexican immigrants return home as a result of the kinds of experiences that tend to disengage them from, rather than link them to, U.S. society.⁴⁶² It is this idea of disengagement that Second Isaiah sought to highlight in order to convince the exiles to leave Babylon and return to their homeland—“The oppressed shall speedily be released; they shall not die and go down to the pit, nor shall they lack bread (Is 51:14).” It is because of an oppressive U.S. society that Mexican immigrants are driven to return to Mexico, a society in which Mexican immigrants are subjected to work-related abuses that discourage them from staying in the United States.⁴⁶³ For example, many immigrant laborers are paid with checks that employers know are not cashable. It is often such injustice and pain suffered during their settlement in the U.S. that fuels their decision to return to Mexico. Likewise in the poetry of Second Isaiah, the prophet/poet views return as inextricably related to the reality of oppression:

You fear continually all day long because of the fury of the oppressor, who is bent on destruction. But where is the fury of the oppressor? The oppressed shall speedily be released; they shall not die and go down to the Pit, nor shall they lack bread. (Isaiah 51:13b-14)

For Second Isaiah, return serves as the reversal of an existence that is viewed in Isaiah 51 as “sorrow and sighing” (v.11), fear before others (v.12), and persistent,

⁴⁶² Leo R. Chavez, “Outside the Imagined Community: Undocumented Settlers and Experiences of Incorporation,” *American Ethnologist* 18 (1991): 258.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 258.

daily coercion (v.13).⁴⁶⁴ Such is the case for many Mexican immigrants who see their home in Mexico as a place of refuge. In Mexico, they are able to openly express their cultural identity without fear of discrimination. The existence of societal oppression makes return a viable option for both Second Isaiah message and the Mexican immigrant experience.

Beyond economic abuses as a cause for return is the Mexican immigrant's longing to be with family.⁴⁶⁵ In other words, within the Mexican immigrant experience, return is not only induced by negative economic forces but also by a unique social dimension. In his study on return migration, David P. Lindstrom argues that this social dimension involves the significant affect of kinship ties on Mexican immigrant's decision to return.⁴⁶⁶ Though life in the U.S. has its economic benefits, many Mexican immigrants are often overwhelmed by the psychic and social costs of separation from family and friends in their communities of origin. Hence, in deciding on the timing of return, Mexican migrants are forced to weigh

⁴⁶⁴ Klaus Baltzer, "Liberation Debt Slavery After the Exile in Second Isaiah and Nehemiah," in *Ancient Israelite Religion*, eds. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 480.

⁴⁶⁵ Recent studies show a decline in the odds of return migration probably partly in response to the militarization of the Mexico-U.S. border. On the other hand, it has also been shown that the likelihood of return is contingent on occupation in the United States, cumulative U.S. experience, and the total number of U.S. trips. Fernando Riosmena, "Return Versus Settlement Among Undocumented Mexican Migrants, 1980 to 1996," in *Crossing the Border: Research from the Mexican Migration Project*, eds. Jorge Durand and Douglas S. Massey (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 273-76.

⁴⁶⁶ David P. Lindstrom, "Economic Opportunity in Mexico and Return Migration from the United States," *Demography* 33(1996): 371.

the emotional costs of separation against the economic benefits of remaining longer in the United States.⁴⁶⁷ In other words, the family combined with economic abuse serves as a powerful force in provoking Mexican immigrants to return home. It is within the economic realm that many Mexican immigrants work in powerless social positions devoid of mutual respect. This lack of respect stems from racially constructed ideas that typically include the following identity markers: Mexicans, darker, ethnic, undocumented/documentated. As a result of being denigrated and abused in the workplace, many Mexican immigrants choose to return to the place where they have status--the Mexican family.⁴⁶⁸ Within the company of family, Mexican immigrants are able to restore the value of their dreams, opinions, and wisdom.

This twofold cause for return Mexican migration is echoed in the message of Second Isaiah in which the prophet/poet highlights the economic abuses of the Babylonian empire and the social dimension of kinship ties (i.e. mother Zion/Jerusalem, father YHWH, ancestral traditions) in order to convince the exilic community to return to Jerusalem.

From colonial times onwards, Mexican familial ideologies have been part of the production of wealth, caste and class system, and legal structures.⁴⁶⁹ In modern

⁴⁶⁷ Lindstrom, "Economic Opportunity in Mexico and Return," 359.

⁴⁶⁸ Victoria Malkin, "We Go to Get Ahead": Gender and Status in Two Mexican Migrant Communities," *Latin American Perspectives* 31(2004): 75-76.

⁴⁶⁹ Malkin, "We Go to Get Ahead," 88.

Mexico, family involves both nuclear and extended members and is the sole provider of economic, emotional, and social security.⁴⁷⁰ For the Mexican immigrant, family plays a key role in the production of social identity, hierarchy, and status. Similar to the exilic experience portrayed in Second Isaiah, the Mexican immigrant experience is one that involves the division of families in which members of the nuclear unit (mother, father, and children) live in two different countries.⁴⁷¹ For many Mexican immigrants, families are often divided as a result of the following three migratory scenarios: father who migrates without their wives and children in Mexico, couples who reside abroad with minor children in Mexico, and mothers of failed unions who leave children when they migrate alone.⁴⁷² From these three, the most prevalent type of Mexican family division is that in which the father leaves his wife and children in Mexico.⁴⁷³ This issue of fatherly abandonment certainly plays into the message of Second Isaiah, in which the Judean exiles leaned toward other gods more effectively than the God of their

⁴⁷⁰ Shawn Malia Kanaiaupuni, "Reframing the Migration Question: An Analysis of Men, Woman, and Gender in Mexico," *Social Forces* 78(June, 2000): 1317.

⁴⁷¹ Joanna Dreby, "Honor and Virtue: Mexican Parenting in the Transnational Context," *Gender & Society* 20 (2006): 33.

⁴⁷² Dreby, "Honor and Virtue," 45.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.* Malkin states that migration is legitimized for men through moralized practices of masculinity, but the reality of migrant life presents a disjuncture for men if their image as a patriarch recedes into a distant Mexico. For many male Mexicans, migration to the U.S. obliges them to adopt several practices that are usually associated with the construction of femininity, such as being tied to the house, perceiving the street as a threat, constant negotiation for respect, and domestic chores, see "We Go to Get Ahead," 79.

ancestors (Is 48) and mother Zion/Jerusalem repeated claims of spousal abandonment (Is 49:20-21; 50:1-3; 51:17-23; 54:1-4). The reality is that in both the biblical context and the Mexican immigrant context families suffer the pain of separation.

For many of the Mexicans who migrate to the United States, it is the female family member—mother, daughter, wife, sister—who is typically left behind. This stems primarily from Mexico’s patriarchal culture which is characterized by a high degree of female subordination within the household.⁴⁷⁴ The patriarchal overtones that color Mexican migration suggest that it is not the weight of more children, but the expectations of what it means to be a good wife, that restrict women’s mobility.⁴⁷⁵ The ideal Mexican wife is subordinate to men, primarily responsible for domestic duties, and crucial to the integrity of the family unit.⁴⁷⁶ In the case of migrating husbands, the left behind wives must assume total responsibility for the care and education of the children.

This reality of a left behind wife/mother can also inform our understanding of the Judean exilic experience and mother Zion/Jerusalem in Second Isaiah. Even though she was a mother who was left behind, Zion/Jerusalem, both a wife and a

⁴⁷⁴ María Aysa and Douglas S. Massey, “Wives Left Behind: The Labor Market Behavior of Women in Migrant Communities,” in *Crossing the Border: Research from the Mexican Migration Project*, eds. Jorge Durand and Douglas S. Massey (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 131.

⁴⁷⁵ Kanaiaupuni, “Reframing the Migration Question,” 1337.

⁴⁷⁶ Paul Winters, Alain de Janvry, and Elisabeth Sadoulet, “Family and Community Networks in Mexico-U.S. Migration,” *The Journal of Human Resources*, 36 (Winter, 2001): 164-66.

mother, still demonstrates an important motherly quality, the desire to care for her children (51:17-52:2; 54:1-10).⁴⁷⁷ Similar to women in Mexico, the value of early Israelite women was in their ability to have children and care for them. In other words, the primary social role of early Israelite women was that of mother in the household.⁴⁷⁸ We see that in Second Isaiah, mother Zion/Jerusalem fully demonstrates the expected qualities of an early Israelite mother. For both Second Isaiah and the Mexican immigrant experience, the woman is forced to respond with resilience and strength to exile/migration in order to fulfill her valued role as mother. Yet, this is often unattainable because of the extensive damage the exile/migration event does to the family unit. Similar to mother Zion/ Jerusalem, Mexican mothers are physically and emotionally torn from their motherhood role with the migration of their sons. Traditionally, Mexican sons have the culturally defined obligation to provide for the economic subsistence of their families and to protect female members. For many Mexican sons, the primary way of fulfilling this cultural expectation is to migrate to the United States—leaving many mothers

⁴⁷⁷ Carey A. Moore, “Jerusalem/Zion as Widow and Mother,” in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, ed. Carol Meyers (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 530.

⁴⁷⁸ Carol L. Meyers, “Women in the Period of the Hebrew Bible,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, eds. Carol A Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 255.

sonless.⁴⁷⁹ Like mother Zion/Jerusalem, the inability to be a mother is a painful aspect of the immigration process. The mother's pain serves to intensify her longing for her son's return. It is expected that Mexican mothers suffer as their sons marry and leave them, male migrants often return to their hometown even if their wife comes from somewhere else.⁴⁸⁰

In the Mexican immigrant experience, there is an extraordinarily high rate of divided Mexican households, with husbands and wives separated across national boundaries for significant portions of their married life.⁴⁸¹ The divided household arrangement is not only a product of the U.S. global economic empire but also a way of life among the majority of Mexican immigrants. The U.S. global economy's need for cheap Mexican male labor has had a profound effect on traditional family dynamics in the communities of origin. For example, fathers who migrate to the U.S. are unable to actively participate in their children's upbringing, which, in turn, contributes to all sorts of emotional and social anxieties.⁴⁸² Their departure also has an effect on their wives. Many Mexican immigrant wives live in a state of anxiety

⁴⁷⁹ Kanaiaupuni, "Reframing the Migration Question," 1319. The precedent set by U.S. immigration policies has perpetuated predominantly male migrant streams and reinforced cultural values of female domesticity and dependence on men. (p 1320)

⁴⁸⁰ Malkin, "We Go to Get Ahead," 85.

⁴⁸¹ Reanne Frank and Elizabeth Wildsmith, "The Grass Widows of Mexico: Migration and Union Dissolution in a Binational Context," *Social Forces* 83(March 2005): 920.

⁴⁸² Rosa María Aguilera-Guzmán, V. Nelly Salgado de Zinder, Martha Romero, and María Elena Medina-Mora, "Paternal Absence and International Migration: Stressors and Compensators Associated with the Mental Health of Mexican Teenagers of Rural Origin," *Adolescence* 39 (Winter 2004): 712.

that their husbands will not return.⁴⁸³ This preoccupation with spousal abandonment is not only a reality in the Mexican immigrant experience but can also be seen in the context of Second Isaiah. In various places, the prophet/poet vividly portrays mother Zion/Jerusalem's anxiety of spousal abandonment. Among the most vivid occurrences is in Is 54:16: "For the LORD has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like the wife of a man's youth when she is cast off, says your God (c.f. Is 49:14; Lam 1)." It is within the context of exile that YHWH, the husband forsakes his wife Zion/Jerusalem (Is 54:4-7).⁴⁸⁴ Hence, the cruel manifestation of both the exile in Second Isaiah and in the Mexican immigrant experience is the painful feelings of abandonment.

Given the rising costs of undertaking a trip to the United States, Mexican wives/mothers are typically left behind without regular financial support from an absent husband.⁴⁸⁵ This leads many women to engage in income-generating activities such as in *maquiladoras*, packing plants, or domestic service. Nevertheless, for many Mexican households with spouses working in the United States, monthly remittances are the principle economic resource and indeed an important means of strengthening the sense of family connectedness. If remittances

⁴⁸³ Wildsmith, "The Grass Widows of Mexico," 920. The authors state that "The Mexican migration flow has remained overwhelmingly circular, spanning national boundaries in a very gendered way for decades. The result has been the creation of an enduring pattern of familial division that has spawned persistent concern over the prevalence and causes of spousal desertion."

⁴⁸⁴ Berges, "Personifications and Prophetic," 62.

⁴⁸⁵ Massey, "Wives Left Behind," 133.

are received with certainty and in adequate amounts, then wives/mothers left behind do not need to work and can dedicate their time to taking care of the children and the household.⁴⁸⁶

In both the Judean exilic experience in Second Isaiah and in the Mexican immigrant experience, family ties are stretched across national boundaries. In both contexts, families undergo emotional, financial, and physical transformations all of which compel the return process. In the Mexican immigrant experience, crossing the border and then in working in the U.S. affect the parents, spouses, and children who wait expectantly for the migrant's return.⁴⁸⁷ Glimpses of the return experience of Mexican immigrants can be seen in the *corridos* about the Mexican immigrant experience. While not artistically superior, these *corridos* are important sources of sociological and historical information. Normally sung at informal social gatherings, they are popular expressions of an experience millions of Mexicans have had, either through their own migration or that of a relative or friend. Furthermore, these ballads can also inform our understanding of the return message in Second Isaiah.

Return as Family Reunification in the *Corridos*

In the popular migrant ballad *Volver Volver/ Return, Return*, the lyrics express the immigrant's profound longing to return to his family in Mexico:

⁴⁸⁶ Massey, "Wives Left Behind," 135.

⁴⁸⁷ Leo R. Chavez, *Shadow Lives Undocumented Immigrants in American Society* (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1992), 119.

Y volver, volver, volver	To return, return, return
a tus brazos otra vez	to your arms once again
llegaré hasta donde estés	I'll make it to where you are
yo se perder, yo se perder	I can swallow my pride
quiero volver, volver, volver	I want to return, return, return. ⁴⁸⁸

The multiple usage of the verb *volver* (return) in this stanza reflects the *corridos* central theme. In developing the theme of return, this *corrido* identifies the reason for returning, which is to be with a loved one. For many Mexican immigrants, this loved one represents their mother back home, their extended family, their friends, and their home in Mexico.⁴⁸⁹ In Mexico, mothers labor hard to maintain significant emotional bonds with their children despite the distance. For both Second Isaiah and the Mexican immigrant *corrido*, the image of coming home to mother is a common image. In the spoken part of the ballad *Un noble engaño/A Noble Deception*, the singer portrays this image of a mother-son reunion:

Después de una larga ausencia	After a long absence
Yo regreso dispuesto a contarles todo,	I returned ready to tell all
Todo lo que	All that is
Encierro aquí en mi pecho	Locked up in my heart.
Mi pobre madre llorando me	My poor mother crying
Abrazaba y me besaba	Hugged and kissed me.
“¡Has vuelto al fin hijo mío!”	“You have returned at last, my son!” ⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁸ Ruben Martinez, *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family of the Migrant Trail*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 292. This author provides the following translation: To return, return, return/ to your arms once again/ I'll catch up to you/ I can swallow my pride/ I want to return, return, return.

⁴⁸⁹ Martinez, *Crossing Over*, 292.

⁴⁹⁰ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound.*, 300.

The mother's loving reaction to her son's return fits the traditional motherhood role in Mexico—caring and loving. Within Mexican society, a great degree of social value is placed on women's roles as mothers. Mexican children respect mothers above else; they are the emotional heart of the family.⁴⁹¹

Within a biblical context, this view of motherhood resembles Second Isaiah's portrayal of mother Zion/Jerusalem. The early Israelite woman's primary social role was that of "mother" in the household. Like Mexican mother's, Zion/Jerusalem is portrayed as a mother who was closely bonded to her children (cf. Is 49:15).⁴⁹² For the mother in the *corrido*, the sadness of separation is quickly forgotten with the return of her son, which is a scene that is found also in Isaiah 49:22, "Thus says the Lord GOD: I will soon lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders." Similar to mother Zion/Jerusalem, mothering in Mexico is mostly associated with the daily care of children.

Family dynamics play an important role in developing the theme of return in the immigrant *corridos*. For instance, in the *corrido*, *El hijo olvidado*/ The Forgotten Son, the singer's parents went to the United States leaving him in Mexico. Although the parents promise to return after a few years, they never do. The singer goes in search of them across the border only to find that they have started a new

⁴⁹¹ Dreby, "Honor and Virtue," 35.

⁴⁹² Perdue, "The Israelite and Early Jewish Family," 181-82.

life with a new family. In the last stanza, the singer returns to Mexico saddened by the news:

A México me regreso	I return to Mexico
Muy triste y decepcionado	Very sad and disillusioned.
Mis padres se quedarán	My parents can remain there (in the U.S.)
Si un día quieren regresar	If ever they want to return
Yo los estaré esperando.	I will be waiting for them. ⁴⁹³

Like this son, those who are left behind also anticipate a family reunion. The children of immigrant parents look forward to the day that their mother and father will return home. This is clearly the case with mother Zion/Jerusalem in Second Isaiah, whose only consolation is the return of her sons and daughters: “Lift up your eyes all around and see; they all gather, they come to you (Is 49:18a).”

Whether as an exile or an immigrant, displacement is felt on both sides of the border. It appears, however that those who suffer the most are those left behind.

The hope of being with family continues to play an integral role in the idea of return in the Mexican *corridos*. In the following ballad, an imprisoned immigrant expresses to his friend, who is returning to Mexico, his desire to see his parents again. The eighth, ninth, and tenth stanzas express emotional distress, tenderness, care, and consideration for the parents of the main character as well as for the imprisoned man’s separation from his family.⁴⁹⁴ In the following lyrics, the immigrant views return not as a journey but as an opportunity to be with his parents:

⁴⁹³ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 294.

⁴⁹⁴ Chew-Sanchez, “Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora,” 177.

Diles que cuando menos lo piensen	Tell them that before they know
yo voy a ir	I will go back
esa mentira, puede que les ayude	this lie may help them to
a vivir	live
Con la esperanza que	with the hope that the who is
el hijo ausente	away from home
un día volverá	will go back one day
se morirán mis padres	My parents would die
si un día saben la verdad	if one day they know the
	truth. ⁴⁹⁵

For the imprisoned son, the primary goal of return is keeping alive the hope that he will one day (*un día*) be reunited with his parents. Regardless of his words' truthfulness, it is the thought of his return that will offer his parents hope. This hope of return is also essential in consoling mother Zion/Jerusalem, who in Isaiah 49:21 states, "21 Then you will say in your heart, "Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and **barren**, exiled and put away -- so who has reared these? I was left all alone -- where then have these come from?" For both mother Zion/Jerusalem and the imprisoned immigrant son's parents, the return of family is the essences of their hope. Speaking hopefulness to exiles may also provide an accurate description of Second Isaiah's message of return. Brueggemann suggests:

It was the peculiar vocation of 2 Isaiah to construct poetic scenarios of alternative reality outside the prosaic control of the empire. These fresh alternatives liberated Jewish exiles to think differently, act differently, speak differently, and sing differently.⁴⁹⁶

One of the key acts of liberation for exiles/immigrants is speech that allows for the hope of return to thrive on both sides of the border. For many Mexican immigrants,

⁴⁹⁵ Chew-Sanchez, "Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora," 178.

⁴⁹⁶ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 95.

their strength of kinship ties extends beyond national boundaries with such force that many Mexican immigrants are compelled to return. This sentiment is reflected in the personal testimony of Cuauhtemoc Menendez, a Mexican immigrant who returned to Mexico: “I worked for three years in electronics and then returned to Mexico. . . . When I returned my son was bigger. Of course he didn’t know me and there wasn’t the trust. But the affection one has keeps you tied to your family. I stayed for twenty days.”⁴⁹⁷ According Leo R. Chavez, “Most undocumented immigrants willingly return to their family and community in their native country after a few months to a year or so in the United States.”⁴⁹⁸ Hence, the family has a profound affect on Mexican immigrants’ decision to return to Mexico. In various Mexican immigrant *corridos*, it is the desire to start a family that compels some immigrants to return. For instance, in the ballad *Me voy a California/ I’m Going to California*, the singer returns home so that he can marry his hometown girlfriend.

Cuando ya pase algún tiempo	After a short time
Y si la suerte es muy buena	And if luck is good to me
Que regresé yo a mi pueblo	I shall return to my hometown
A cumplirle a mi morena	To keep my promise to my brunette
Entonces nos casaremos	Then we shall marry
Ay que vida tan Hermosa	Oh what a beautiful life. ⁴⁹⁹

The singer’s desire for home is grounded in his promise to marry his “*morena*”. It is in their union as husband and wife that their beautiful life is imagined to begin.

⁴⁹⁷ Marilyn P. Davis, *Mexican voices/American Dreams: An Oral History of Mexican Immigration to the United States* (New York: H. Holt, 1990), 293.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁴⁹⁹ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 257.

Promises of marriage in conjunction with the idea of return resemble Second Isaiah's image of return: "For your Maker is your husband . . . For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you (Is 54: 5-7)." Second Isaiah, uses the image of love and marriage to create a compelling image of return for the Judean exilic community. In both Second Isaiah and the selected *corrido*, the return is seen as an opportunity for husband and wife to come together.

Family Disarray

In Second Isaiah, the view of return maintains a positive and celebratory tone throughout. In the end, mother Zion/Jerusalem, father YHWH, and their children in exile will be gathered together in joyous fashion. This, however, is not always the case with the theme of return in the Mexican immigrant *corridos*. In some *corridos*, immigrants return to a family in disarray. In the ballad *El Mojado Fracasado/ The Wetback Who Failed*, the immigrant returns home to find his family completely shattered:

Cuando volví	When I returned
Mi jacalito	My little hut
Solo encontré	Was all alone,
Mis viejecitos	My poor parents
Habían muerto	Had died,
Y con otro hombre	And with another man
Hallé a mi mujer.	I found my wife. ⁵⁰⁰

In this *corrido*, the reality of returning home after several years is that things have tragically changed for the immigrant's family. For many Mexican immigrants,

⁵⁰⁰ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 270.

returning home to family can be a tragic event; emotionally and physically stained family relationships can result in heartbreak on the part of returning immigrants. This theme of heartbreak is vividly expressed in the *corrido De aquellas idas al norte/Those Trips to the North*:

Cuando regresé a mi pueblo	When I returned to my village
Con que tristeza y dolor;	with sadness and pain,
Encontré mi hogar deshecho,	I found my home all broken up
Sin dignidad y sin honor.	Without dignity or honor.
Mis padres ya se habían muerto,	My parents had died,
Mi mujer me abandonó;	My wife had abandoned me; ⁵⁰¹

For this singer, the return is not a joyful family reunion but a grim reality of severed family relationships. In this *corrido*, the return becomes like the exile; both involve family separation, whereas in Second Isaiah such disrupted family relationships are only associated with the exile (e.g. Is 47:8; Is 54:1-7). Although, this negative aspect of return in the immigrant *corridos* does diverge from the return image presented in Second Isaiah, it can allow us to see differently the Judean exile's anxieties about the return journey (i.e. water, desert, and pathway).

From the Mexican immigrant experience, the return may culminate with a joyous family reunion or involve elements of profound sorrow. Ruben Martinez reminds us of this in the following:

The migrant can't easily return home: In the first place, there's the matter of money (the reason he came to America in the first place). But there's also the fact that even a physical return home will not satisfy the migrant's desire to feel at home; the homeland, frozen in the time of the migrant mind, no longer exists.⁵⁰²

⁵⁰¹ Herrera-Sobek, "Toward the Promised Land," 244.

⁵⁰² Martinez, *The New Americans*, 177.

For Segovia, this feeling represents “otherness,” which describes the experience of many first-generation immigrants. Becoming the “other” means living as permanent aliens or strangers, both from where they came and where they find themselves.⁵⁰³ In returning home, Mexican immigrants often find a home in despair, where the experience of “otherness” is still a lingering reality. This “otherness” is what Isaiah attempts to avoid by projecting a romanticized view of return, one in which family unity is a certainty. In the immigrant *corridos*, it is not always certain that the family will be together when the immigrant returns. In fact, the reality is that family relationships have been tragically transformed by the migration process.

In an effort to avoid this tragedy, immigrants often bring their whole family to the United States. This strategy not only increases the odds of families staying together but also makes it less likely that these families will return to Mexico. This survival mechanism is reflected in the ballad *Jaula de oro/Golden cage*:

Tengo mi esposa y mis hijos	I have my wife and my children
Que me los traje de chicos	I brought them when they were very young
Y se han olvidado ya	and they have already forgotten
de mi México querido	my beloved Mexico
del que yo nunca me olvido	the one I never forget
y al que no puedo regresar	and the one I cannot go back to. ⁵⁰⁴

Because the singer’s family is already united, his return to Mexico is uncertain.

Migrants who are accompanied by their spouse and children are likely to develop

⁵⁰³ Segovia, “Toward a Hermeneutics of the Diaspora,” 64.

⁵⁰⁴ Chew-Sanchez, “Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora,” 151.

stronger social and economic ties in the United States. Family and community networks reduce the likelihood of return. The larger the family and community networks, the greater the quantity of information and assistance provided and the greater the influence on staying in the United States.⁵⁰⁵ From Lindstrom's perspective, having extended kin in destination areas reduce the social isolation experienced by labor migrants.⁵⁰⁶

This idea of family connectedness in the host country may also provide insight into why Second Isaiah had to go to such great lengths rhetorically to convince the Judean exilic community to return. From texts like Jeremiah 29:4-7 and Ezra 1-4, we can assume that the Judean exiles had established deep family roots in Babylon. In Second Isaiah, the prophet/poet tries to reorient the exilic community toward a more valued family, mother Zion/Jerusalem and father YHWH in order to have the community return. Hence, through the Mexican immigrant experience new interpretive possibilities emerge with the image of return in Second Isaiah.

This *corrido* moves into a spoken segment in which the son does not share the father's desire of returning to Mexico:

Escuchame m'ijo ¿ te gustaría que	Listen my son, would you like
regresáramos a México?	to go back to
What are you talking about dad?	Mexico?
No way, I do not want to go	What are you talking about dad?
back to Mexico	No way, I do not want to go
	back to Mexico

⁵⁰⁵ Sadoulet, "Family and Community Networks," 164.

⁵⁰⁶ Lindstrom, "Economic Opportunity in Mexico and Return Migration," 372.

No way dad.

No way dad.⁵⁰⁷

The immigrant father talks in a tender tone to his son and asks him if he will go back to Mexico with him. The son's refusal to return—emphasized by his response in English rather than Spanish—is determinate. It is apparent that family not only affects the immigrant's decision to return, but also can affect the immigrant's decision to stay. Arguably, it may be this kind of family dynamic that is at play in the message of Second Isaiah. Throughout Second Isaiah, the prophet/poet addresses the exilic community in familial terms (i.e. sons, daughters, and children; Is 43:6; 45: 11; 47: 8, 9, 20, 25; 49: 22; 51: 18, 20; 54:1, 13). It is within this familial language that the prophet addresses issues of idol worship (Is 41), which was a likely force in keeping the exilic community from returning. The duration of exile/migration creates increased opportunities for exiles/immigrants to become established in the host country, which, in turn, makes return more unlikely.

Family and Faith

Words that express hope of return can be seen in the ballad *Pueblo Querido*/Beloved Town. In this *corrido*, the singer, who represents the immigrant voice, talks about the homesickness he feels while living in the United States. The immigrant character expresses that he misses his family and dear ones as much as the landscape of his homeland.⁵⁰⁸ Away from home, it is the migrant's separation from "my parents and my brothers" that he "wishes he could see them again"

⁵⁰⁷ Chew-Sanchez, "Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora," 152.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 192.

because “remembering them makes me sad, sadness makes me cry.” In the third stanza, he says that in moments of deep sadness he visualizes his mother in his hometown, praying for him.⁵⁰⁹ In the end, seeing his family is the central part of his hope in the return process:

Yo ansío con todo me ser	I wish with all my heart
Regresar a mi pueblo querido	to go back to my beloved town
Y mi Diós me lo ha de conceder	and my God shall grant it to me
Para morirme allá con los míos	to die over there with my
	people. ⁵¹⁰

The overall impression one receives from this *corrido* is that return is not a journey but an act of family solidarity and kinship. In this stanza, a safe return is connected to God’s favor upon the immigrant. This theological element of return is closely related to the image of return portrayed in Second Isaiah. Throughout Second Isaiah, YHWH is seen taming or transforming various chaotic elements in nature in order to allow the exiles to return safely to mother Zion/Jerusalem. The journey back from the United States can be fraught with dangers. Because immigrants typically return with goods and cash, they make tempting targets for unscrupulous officials as they cross the border back into Mexico.⁵¹¹ For many Mexican immigrants a safe return to their families is closely related to their faith in God.

⁵⁰⁹ Chew-Sanchez, “Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora,” 192.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ Jorge Durand and Douglas S. Massey, *Miracles on the Border: Retablos of Mexican Migrants to the United States* (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1995), 115.

Like in Second Isaiah, the return to Mexico is viewed as a miraculous event. For example in the *corrido Tierras de California/Lands of California*, it is the Mother of God who is invoked for a safe return:

Madrecita yo te pido	My dearest Mother (of God), I beg you
que al regresar al terruño	That when I return to my homeland
encuentre a todos los míos	I shall find all my kinfolk
y que no falte ninguno.	And not be missing a single one. ⁵¹²

In this stanza, the immigrant pleads with the Mother of God, who also the Virgin of Guadalupe, that he may return to the bosom of his entire family. Invoking the Virgin of Guadalupe, the central symbol of Mexican culture, or God for a safe return is likewise found in the *corrido Mexicano cien por ciento/ One Hundred Percent Mexican*:

A trabajar yo he cruzado la frontera	I have crossed the border to work
Recordando a mi familia con dolor	Remembering my family with great pain
Que La Virgen los proteja mientras	May the Virgin protect them until I return
Por las noches le ruego a mi lindo Dios	I pray nightly to my beautiful Lord.

The pain of being separated from family because of the migration process is vividly expressed in this stanza. It is the immigrant's prayer that he can return to be with his family again. For many Mexican immigrants, a successful return journey is often predicated on whether or not their family will be there to receive them. The hope that his family is kept safe until his return becomes a central concern of the immigrant's theology. Likewise, this element of a successful return being an

⁵¹² Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 233.

enterprise of God is at the root of Second Isaiah's message of return. For Second Isaiah, the return involves a miraculously guided procession through the transformed desert. It is an event that represents a new exodus in which the Lord makes a way through the hostile desert for the exiles to return to Zion/Jerusalem.

Family Intact

Another crucial reality of return expressed in Mexican immigrant *corridos* is that the return can be a joyous one.⁵¹³ In the following *corrido*, *Bajo el cielo de Morella*/ Under the Sky of Morella, a Mexican seasonal migrant returns with joy because he sees his wife again:

Veó qué una mujer rezaba sin consuelo en su carita	I saw a woman praying whose face looked distressful
Era mi Juare Maria Qué por mi rezaba un credo Hasta lloró de alegría Cuando le dije me quedo En esta tierra, mi vida Bajo su precioso cielo	She was my Juare Maria who was praying a creed for me she even cried out of happiness when I told her "I am going to stay in this land, my love, Under its beautiful sky." ⁵¹⁴

This stanza describes the woman's pre-return state as "*sin consuelo* (distressful)." This is a common state for many Mexican wives who are left behind by migrating husbands. It is not until the husband returns that her sad state changes to complete happiness. Among the themes highlighted in this *corrido* is the idea of return to the

⁵¹³ Martinez, *The New Americans*, 153.

⁵¹⁴ Chew-Sanchez, "Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora," 196.

land. This theme is also central to Second Isaiah’s message of return.⁵¹⁵ Although the sight of family unity is a cause for joy (cf. Is 55:12-13), the prospect of a new inheritance of land also gives the returning exiles reason to celebrate (cf. Is 49:8-9; 51:3).

In the same *corrido*, the theme of the land is quickly taken over by the joy the immigrant feels at seeing his wife again:

Me miraban sus ojitos	Her little eyes looked at me
Mi Juare crela un milagro	my Juare thought it was a miracle
Después nos fuimos camino	later we took a walk
A dar una vuelta al lago	to the lake
Y cuando andaba en Janitzio	and when I was in Janitzio
Sé me olvidó el otro lado	I forgot the other side. ⁵¹⁶

The joy of being united with his wife leads him to forget “*el otro lado*”—the place of shame and estrangement. The joyous reunification of husband and wife overwhelm all the experiences of familial separation and cultural shame associated with the other side. In constructing a compelling image of return, Second Isaiah similarly develops images of family reunification between wife Zion/Jerusalem and husband YHWH that serve to reorient the exiles toward their homeland and forget “the former things”(Is 43:18) on the other side (i.e. Babylon).

The joy of seeing family again allows the Mexican immigrants to forget their shame. Both Second Isaiah and the Mexican immigrant *corridos* respond to this shame with words that speak of family unity. For example, in Isaiah 54:14, YHWH

⁵¹⁵ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 148-50.

⁵¹⁶ Chew-Sanchez, “Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora,” 197.

speaks to mother Zion/Jerusalem, “Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; do not be discouraged, for you will not suffer disgrace; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the disgrace of your widowhood you will remember no more (Is 54:4).” In the ballad *Despedida de Karnes City Texas/Farewell from Karnes City, Texas, Mexico*, the motherland, also maintains her dignity in the minds of immigrants:

A nuestra patria volvemos	We return to our homeland
De 18 de octubre	Eigteenth day of October
Inolvidable mañana,	An unforgettable morning.
Que regresamos gustosos	We returned happily
a la Patria Mexicana.	To the Mexican motherland. ⁵¹⁷

In these lyrics, Mexico is the personified mother to whom the immigrants return with a joyful dignity. These lyrics bespeak the strength and honor of the immigrants’ homeland, which is their source of pride. The pride for their Mexican homeland also resonates with Second Isaiah’s portrayal of Zion/Jerusalem, “For the LORD will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song (51:3; cf. 48:20 and 55:11).” In unique lyrical fashion, the prophet/poet attempts to infuse a sense of pride for its tradition homeland into the Judean exilic community so that it will want to return.

⁵¹⁷ Herrera-Sobek, *Northward Bound*, 294.

Conclusions

The poetry of Second Isaiah shows a pervasive rhetorical strategy of reinterpreting the exile to prepare the way for the problematic return from Babylon. The poetry repeatedly stresses continuity with Israel's past, especially the value it places on family solidarity. Through a rhetorical reading, the details of the text reveal an image of return that is fairly consistent throughout. This image incorporates essential elements of Israelite history in creating a compelling image of return. Combined with diaspora theology, our reading of Second Isaiah also illuminates Mexican immigrant *corridos*. This cultural expression of the Mexican immigrant experience provides ample opportunities for Mexican immigrants to symbolically re-experience the relationships they have with their homeland, their relatives, and their loved ones.⁵¹⁸ Many migrants who choose to return soon discover that things are not the same at home. The Mexico they left is not the same Mexico. Just as the ruins of Jerusalem reflected a different city for the exiles, the return journey for the Mexican immigrant is often a return to the now unfamiliar, where the experience of "otherness" experienced in the U.S. in fact does not dissipate, but continues as a lingering reality. While many men, particularly early migrants, may have reaped economic rewards for their labor, migrants most often

⁵¹⁸ Chew-Sanchez, "Cultural Memory in the Rituals of the Mexican Diaspora," 24.

complain that they are “programmed” in the U.S., that they do nothing but work, and that they are “imprisoned” there.⁵¹⁹

This fear of “otherness” is what Isaiah attempts to avoid by reminding the exiles of their old memories and old affirmations. For this reason the poet has to persuade displaced people that after two generations, Babylon is still not home.⁵²⁰

Brueggemann calls this a historical memory of an Israelite alternative.⁵²¹ To avoid “otherness,” many Mexican migrants return to Mexico. Although home has changed, they can recover a sense of it in their family. In returning, they attempt to ignore the fact that what they remember and dream about of their homeland is becoming increasingly a world of dreams rather than reality. And so they choose to return to avoid living in two worlds and no world at the same time.⁵²²

For these immigrants Mexico thus becomes a site of “life,” of family, and of meaning, the United States is a space for (waged) work.⁵²³ In both Second Isaiah and the Mexican immigrant *corridos*, return to family is a central theme. The idea of all the family being together (i.e. YHWH, father/husband, Zion/Jerusalem mother/wife, and Exiles sons and daughters in Second Isaiah) is an integral component of the exiles’ desire to return. Likewise, in the *corridos*, mother, wife,

⁵¹⁹ Malkin, “We Go to Get Ahead,” 77.

⁵²⁰ Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 113.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁵²² Segovia, “In the World but Not of It,” 202-03.

⁵²³ Malkin, ““We Go to Get Ahead,”” 77.

parents, sons and daughters are reflected in the immigrant's understanding of return. One aspect of family that compels many Mexican immigrants to return is the pain families feel from being left behind. In various Mexican immigrant *corridos*, the idea of return is expressed within the context of this common hardship of family disruption.⁵²⁴

For both the Mexican immigrant experience and the message of return in Second Isaiah, the return is a real life journey that involves the family. For both contexts, the family plays an important part on the decision to return. It is the family that makes these experience flesh and blood experiences.

⁵²⁴ Chew-Sanchez, "Cultural Memory and the Mexican Diaspora," 137.

Conclusion

In considering the dynamics of the relationship between the Jews who were militarily and forcibly exiled by Babylon and Mexican immigrants driven north by U.S. global economy, I have sought to bring to the fore issues of identity, displacement, and marginalization. Ultimately, this project has tried to achieve an alternative way of liberation for many undocumented Mexican immigrant groups by giving voice to their stories of discrimination, travail, exploitation, and survival. In exposing the harshness of the Mexican immigrant journey, I have sought to challenge the dominant ideologies of the present, which yearn for settlement, security, and assimilation. The conclusions I strive to reach are those that integrate the Bible with the issues of immigration.

Within the framework of diaspora theology, Second Isaiah's vision of exile and return provides status, dignity, and explanation for subaltern groups like Mexican immigrants. Furthermore, the vision of exile and return in the Mexican immigrant experience in turn informs our understanding of a similar vision in the poetry of Second Isaiah. Both texts represent unique folkloric traditions which provide insight into the real life conditions of exile and return. In the poetry of Second Isaiah, there is a distinct mixture of thematic ingredients which include ancestral traditions and cultural symbols. These themes serve a particular rhetorical function, involving the Judean exilic community and its return to Zion/Jerusalem. Elements of Second Isaiah's rhetorical strategy can also be found in the lyrics found in various Mexican immigrant *corridos*. From the perspective of diaspora theology, these *corridos* are viable cultural expressions for understanding exile and return

not as metaphorical types but as actual lived experiences. These popular Mexican ballads are replete with allusions to distinct cultural traditions and symbols. Like Second Isaiah, these *corridos* embody a prophetic voice for the Mexican immigrant community. Their primary purpose is wide dissemination among those who have crossed borders, felt exploited, and long for peace. As with the message of Second Isaiah, these *corridos* are designed to stimulate the imagination of the Mexican immigrant community and orient it toward their *querido Mexico*/ beloved Mexico.

For many Mexican immigrants, their story is found in the Mexican immigrant *corridos*. These *corridos* represent a symbolic cultural memory that stands in opposition to the repressive forces of the U.S. global empire that induce migration. Their value lies in their ability to portray a holistic perspective of the Mexican immigrant experience in the United States--one that humanizes, celebrates and denounces migrant's everyday challenges, adversities and experiences.⁵²⁵ Herrera-Sobek's words aptly describe their value:

The *corrido*, through its continued announcement of injustices, gives the plight of the immigrant greater attention. The politics of metaphorization valorize the immigrant experience and eventually force society at large to reevaluate and revise negative views of the immigrant. Song writers exploring the immigrant experience believe in the mediating power of their lyrics.⁵²⁶

By coordinating their interaction with the poetry of Second Isaiah, we create new understandings of exile and return that are explicitly critical and aimed at action. This form of interaction is not just an imaginative and stimulating way for us to read the bible.

⁵²⁵ Chew-Sanchez, "Cultural Memory in the Rituals of the Mexican Diaspora," 23.

⁵²⁶ "Corridos and Canciones of Mica, Migra, and Coyotes: A Commentary on Undocumented Immigration," 103.

Rahter, these texts allow us to learn about the flesh and blood experience of Mexican-U.S. migration, grasping their claims of injustice, discrimination, and exploitation. In essence, the voices heard in the immigrant *corridos* represent the real voices of a displaced and oppressed community.

By allowing the Mexican immigrant *corridos* to enter into dialogue with the poetry of Second Isaiah, we are orient ourselves to a mindset of diaspora. This mental positioning views the diasporic categories of exile and return as real life happenings that are politically moving and powerfully relevant for today's reader of the Bible. In other words, from this dialogue of texts, we discover that both of the immigrant *corridos* and Second Isaiah speak of exile and return through the real life themes such as homeland, identity, family, and faith. We learn that exile and return effect actual family relationships. Mothers are painfully separated from their sons, and fathers are tragically separated from their daughters and wives. It is within the realm of the family that exile and return become concrete categories for us readers.

Through our engagement with the Mexican immigrant *corridos*, our reading of Second Isaiah takes a far more realistic view of the struggles, pains, and joys of the exile and return journeys. Furthermore, this engagement allows us to renew our interpretive lens for one that gives us insight into the life of an exile or immigrant. This insight is particularly liberating for those who have been protected from the real life experiences of exile or immigration. Even more beneficial is the potential to bring clarity to prevailing myths, misconceptions and stereotypes about the Mexican immigrant community and the Judean exilic community.

In terms of the Mexican immigrant experience, the dialogue produced between Second Isaiah and immigrant *corridos* has enormous political implications. In other words, this reading project does more than entertain our intellect. The primary objective of this project is to change us from spectators to political activists. This is not only the humanitarian thing to do; it is the biblical thing to do. It from a political stance that the voice of the Mexican immigrant is elevated to a place of prominence, allowing it to be better heard and understood. In terms of political, we move away from a metaphorized view of exile and return to a real life understanding of these categories. It becomes a real life experience, which include pains of hunger and thirst and the joys of a mother's embrace. It allows abstract and distant symbols like mother Zion/Jerusalem to become a real mother with real concerns and anxieties. Most importantly, however, this reading project gives the voice of the marginalized Mexican immigrant community a chance to speak and tell its story and for that story to be given a new kind of status through comparison with the biblical experience. From this story, we discover a level of suffering and pain that is beyond just the symbolic. They reveal an experience of displacement that not only is compatible with the message of Second Isaiah but also the whole Bible itself. In the Bible, there is the meta-narrative of a peoples' journey away from a homeland to a distant land and vice versa. This grand narrative is not only found in the Bible but also throughout human history.

In reading the Mexican immigrant *corridos* along side the poetry of Second Isaiah, we also discover a broader vision for biblical research. It is evident that throughout the biblical text, we find a profound harmony with contemporary international migration/exile experiences. Considering this interaction of the biblical text with present

day migration/exile represents more than just a facile application of the Bible to a present life condition. Rather, by applying the biblical text to current issues of international immigration, the outcome is sure to be intensely political and socially liberating. By taking the central theme of diaspora in the Bible and allowing it to dialogue with contemporary migratory or exilic experiences, we create a unique space in which multiple voices interact in a redemptive way.

Today's growth of international migration is a phenomenon that can orient us to ask critically engaging questions about the biblical text: how can the biblical text impact immigrant/exilic groups or how precisely can its vision of exile and return be informative for today's international migration problem? Or even more important, do we find in the bible a critique of the broader context of the U.S. global imperialism and its systemic connection to immigration issues? In brief, the contemporary international migration phenomenon is capable of stimulating innovations in the field of Biblical Studies from various perspectives (social, political, economic, cultural, and religious).

In the end, I hope this project has demonstrated to the field of Biblical Studies the importance of engaging in an ongoing immigration dialogue. Within Biblical Studies, the history of the "other" is still viewed as irrelevant to a scholarly understanding of the Bible. Though the tools of the enlightenment are useful to biblical research, they fall short from allowing the Bible to be used in way that brings voice to people like the Mexican immigrant community. The challenge for current biblical research is become more multidimensional in its approach to texts and that not one approach, school, race has territorial rights to the biblical message. Its challenge will be to allow the stories of those considered socially undesirable to enter into dialogue with traditional biblical

research. In essence, the time has come for biblical research to start looking outside the walls of the academy and give an opportunity to the voiceless and faceless people of our world to speak. It is time that biblical research address with genuine concern the pain and suffering of today's exile. The flattened view of today's biblical scholarship leaves no space for creating real social change, and such an attitude is incongruent with the scripture's diasporic instinct. Denying agency and negating the role of power in cultural production have left Biblical Studies hollow. Through this project, however, I have intended to show that the biblical text can inform and be informed by texts of the present 'other,' which in turn gives agency to present subaltern migratory groups. As a field Biblical studies continually needs to reevaluate its status in a volatile and changing global context of marginalized voices.

The idea of the past has only hindered the bible's potential to address the political issues of our day. The studies of tomorrow will need to engage the broader context of the immigrant. We have to begin understanding the Bible is for the people and requires a message for the people--one that is real to their lives--one that can give voice to their people--one that can empower there cause for change and dignity.

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VITA

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ABSTRACT

VOICES OF MARGINALITY: EXILE AND RETURN IN SECOND ISAIAH 40-55 AND THE MEXICAN IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

by Gregory Lee Cuellar, Ph.D., 2006
Brite Divinity School

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From a contemporary standpoint, the journey experiences of exile and return in the Hebrew Bible present some interesting connections and parallels with other forms of social movement such as international migration and border-crossings. In terms of my specific positioning as a Hispanic in the U.S. Southwest, this dissertation intends to “read-across” journey experiences of exile and return. In terms of a reading trajectory, I first read the exile and return experiences addressed by Second Isaiah (40-55) across to the contemporary Mexican migratory experience. This reading project is theoretically grounded in a theology of the diaspora, which, according to Fernando F. Segovia, is a theology grounded and forged in the migratory experience of U.S. Hispanics. From this perspective, the Jewish Babylonian exiles and contemporary Mexican migrants are viewed as common human experiences of diaspora. Moreover, these experiences find

expression in each of these groups' corresponding cultural literature. Thus, I propose to read-across this spectrum of cultural literature and compare the poetry of Second Isaiah and the Mexican immigrant *corridos* (ballads). In the end, this dissertation argues that the diasporic categories of exile and return in Second Isaiah can inform our reading of exile and return in the cultural literature of the Mexican immigrant and vice versa. In other words through the *corridos* about the Mexican immigrant experience, one is able to see that Second Isaiah is also a form of oppositional culture, serving as a sharp critique of the imperial system.