

“My Death is Better Than My Life” (Jon 4:3, 8): Deconstructing Jonah’s Response to the Assyrian “Revival” in a Bifurcated World

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There are multiple ways to define and measure revival. While John Wesley was in Georgia, he has seen revival as “a short-term, dramatic increase in the number of people within a community showing a renewal of interest in religion, followed by an equally dramatic decline of interest in religion.”¹ Being an Anglican clergyperson at that time, he also considered revival as a product of preaching, worship, fellowship meeting, teaching and charity.² Wesley’s take on revivalism has been viewed as a conservative side of Methodism that “played a crucial role in preventing revolution and helped to create an ordered and peaceful England.”³ This paper in contrast explores the political ramification of revival in the Hebrew Bible, specifically the book of Jonah, and its relevance to the revival of global Methodism. A quick survey of the verb “to revive” (חַיָּה) in the Hebrew Bible immediately informs us about the issue at hand: revival is a process in which human, animals, cities or nations that have been suffering from sickness, discouragement or even death or defeat are restored or brought back to life again. In other words, revival involves conditions of life, the detriment of life, the fear of death, death itself, and even life after death. Revival may alleviate, if not saving people from, the negative effect of sickness or death. It may even revert the undesirable conditions of life and keep ones from any further demise.

The book of Jonah does not actually use the verb “to revive.” Nevertheless, the language or imagery of death (מוֹת) abounds in it. As Jonah went on to Tarshish to flee from YHWH’s commission, potential fatal event, a great storm on the sea (Jon 1:4), fell upon Jonah and those who were around him. Such a storm that is sometimes perceived as YHWH’s wrath (Jer 23:19; Ps 83:16) could be a warning sign instead of a death sentence. But to those who were literally on the same boat, they certainly felt that they were about to perish (Jon 1:6). Interestingly, Jonah did not care for his own demise. He just kept “going down” (יָרַד; Jon 1:3, 5) until he arrived at the bottom of the ship, presumably the closest space to the chaotic sea. He also did not hesitate to propose to the sailors that throwing him into the sea would ensure their survival (Jon 1:12). While others might have to kill in order to survive, Jonah would rather die than live. This does not happen only once, but twice as we see Jonah’s another similar reaction concerning the repentance of the Ninevites. Having seen that the people of Nineveh were pardoned by YHWH, Jonah demanded YHWH to take his life for he contended that “my death is better than my life”

¹ Charles H. Goodwin, “John Wesley: Revival and Revivalism, 1736-1768,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31, no. 1 (1996): 176.

² Goodwin, “John Wesley,” 178.

³ Brian W. Gobbett, “Inevitable Revolution and Methodism in Early Industrial England: Revisiting the Historiography of the Halévy Thesis,” *Fides et Historia* 29 (1997): 28.

(טוב מותי מחי; Jon 4:3). Once again, Jonah would rather die than live. Yet the difference from chapter one is that there is no punishment pending, no collateral damage, no divine wrath about to be unleashed upon anybody, but supposedly a happy ending – in fact no one has to die. So why does Jonah would rather choose to die than live in a happy world? Perhaps a world with the people of Nineveh alive and well is not a pleasant world to Jonah at all.

Some interpreters, ancient and contemporary, highlights the ideological conflict in the book between universalism and particularism. Jonah and the people that he is representing, apparently being an advocate for particularism, are not thrilled but traumatized by YHWH's change of mind to pardon the sin and violence that the Assyrians has done to the people of Israel (Jon 4:1). The audience or reader of this text is inadvertently absorbed into a binary world where one's survival or revival becomes a direct cause to another's demise or vice versa. Despite the fictional nature of the book that invites a plethora of interpretations, categories such as the oppressor and the oppressed, the colonizers and the colonized, the victimizers and the victims are grossly imposed on the contentious relationship between Jonah and the people of Nineveh, or whatever these characters in the story signify. However, as we have already seen from Jonah's reactions, the animosity is one-sided, not from the supposed oppressor, the Assyrians, but from Jonah, the representative of the oppressed. As such, the spokesperson from the oppressed is not entirely without a voice. On the contrary, Jonah's judgment oracle is succinct (five words – עֹד (אֲרָבָעִים יוֹם וְיָנִיחָה נְהַפְכָת and packed with power and certainty (Jon 3:4).⁴ A simplified binary understanding of the relationship between Jonah and the people of Nineveh is therefore problematic as we miss the unfinalizable dialogue between the two layers of discourses that constitute the book of Jonah, namely Jonah's discourse and the book's response.

Jonah's Discourse through Foucauldian Lens

The layer of discourse that I posit Jonah and his people create and propagate is by no means a suggestion of a literary source or tradition in the conventional historical-critical sense. Instead, it is the Foucauldian concept of author that I intend to draw on in reconstructing what Jonah's discourse would look like. Foucault argues that an author's name suggests "a relationship of homogeneity, filiation, authentication of some texts by the use of others, reciprocal explication, or concomitant utilization."⁵ In other words, an author's name is entangled with certain discourse(s) that become a normative, are circulated, and transformed. Such discourse can be the principles on which a certain society is run. We see that some societies set up and execute "rules of exclusion" that prohibit and reject certain behaviors and thoughts. People who have the power to create and propagate the discourse will eliminate any room for inquiry and criticism. They will also indoctrinate their followers the one and only indisputable "truth" that they have created. True claims are not something that exist outside their discourse, but their formulation to protect the status quo. Patriotism, ethnic identity, orthodoxy, orthopraxis, orthopathos and divine mandate become part of the rhetoric of the powerful and privileged that shapes and subjugates the rest of the community. In Foucauldian terms, Jonah is not a real person, but a set of unifying principle, the origin of the significance of the discourse, and the foundation of its coherence that controls the lived experience of the community. I observe that Jonah's discourse is embedded in the book and plays the same roles and functions.

⁴ Uriel Simon, *Jonah*, The JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia: JPS, 1999), 29.

⁵ Foucault, "What is an Author," 107.

One of the main elements in Jonah's discourse concerns the portrayal of YHWH. When Jonah was found out that he was somehow related to the great storm that got him and the people on the boat into, he confessed that YHWH, the God of heaven is the one that he feared (וַאֲתֵי-יְהוָה; Jon 1:9). The uncommon word order with the object, namely YHWH, the God of heaven, placed before the subject and verb signifies an emphasis on the epithet. YHWH is obviously being contrasted with the sailors' gods who have lost to YHWH for YHWH has the dominion over and thus the ability to control the great storm. The modifying clause אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה אֶת-הַיָּם וְאֶת-הַיַּבָּשָׁה further differentiates the God of heaven from the gods of the sailors. The differentiation not only sets up a binary opposition between the one God and other gods, it also creates a hierarchical structure in which the God of heaven has dominion over other gods because the latter are incapable to do what the former can do. In addition, the dominating God of heaven is also contrasted with compassionate and gracious God (אֶל-הַנּוֹן וְרַחֲוִים; Jon 4:3). If Jonah's running away from YHWH's initial commission signifies his reluctance to accept a benevolent divine imagery, his discourse would probably be its binary opposite, and prefers an unchanging God who will do justice to God's people and punish those who oppress them. Jonah so believes in his discourse that he is willing to sacrifice his own life to make it even more convincing – only proper atonement, namely a human life, can calm down the wrath of the God of heaven.

Jonah's sacrificial act has long been interpreted as a type of Christ. Interestingly, both the sacrifices are executed by those who are ambivalently portrayed. The role of Pilate in Jesus' death is seen differently in the Synoptic and Johannine Gospels. Markan Gospel is the only one among the four that portrays Pilate as an accomplice to Jesus' death. Pilate in the Matthean Gospel states explicitly that he has no part in crucifying Jesus, whereas both the Lukan and the Fourth Gospels emphasize that Pilate had the intention to release Jesus (Luke 23:20; John 19:12). In the case of the sailors, the narrative does not say whether they are converted to worshippers of YHWH or they only prayed to the God of heaven because their life was on the line. But we do know that they are reluctant to kill Jonah and certainly do not want to be held accountable for his death. Jewish and Christian exegetes have not been paying much attention to the sailors' conversion. Instead, some of them have focused on the people of Nineveh and contended that their "conversion" is superficial and short-lived.⁶ There is obviously no way to verify whether the conversion in chapter three is genuine and long-lasting. Such speculation is nevertheless founded on the book of Nahum announcing the judgment oracle against Nineveh. Yet I wonder if the way that we judge a person or a group of people by their worst moments is a fair trial. Nineveh is indeed eventually punished by YHWH, but does that make their earlier "conversion" to YHWH superficial and short-lived? The same can be said regarding the sailors' prayer to YHWH and their possible conversion. What is at stake here may not so much have to do with the truthfulness of their conversion, but more with how Jonah's discourse characterizes the people of Nineveh and shapes the affect of the audience/readers toward them.

The Fear in Jonah's Discourse

⁶ Sebastian Fuhrmann and Gary S. Helft, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, vol. 14: Jesus-Kairos (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), s.v. "Jonah (Book and Person)," 575.

While this paper is using poststructuralist theories to read the book of Jonah, it seems appropriate to take an affective turn just as the theories have turned toward in the second half of the 20th century. When Jonah reveals his identity to the sailors, the uncommon word order not only indicates an emphasis on the epithet of YHWH, but also delays the disclosure of Jonah's feeling, namely his fear. Most commentators will agree that what Jonah means by "I fear" (אֲנִי יִרָא; Jon 1:9) is clearly more of a reverence to YHWH than a reference of his emotional state; hence, NRSV translates it into "I worship." Neither do I contend that the phrase is about emotion or feeling that we typically understand. A brief reiteration of Sara Ahmed's affect theory will suffice to lend us a different perspective here. According to Ahmed, fear is not a case of emotions passing from a person onto others like contagion, but of objects, which are shaped by emotions, circulating around bodies.⁷ Once an object, animate or inanimate, is attributed with fear, this object of fear "secure[s] the relationship between those bodies; it brings them together and move them apart through the shudders that are felt on the skin ... through the encounter."⁸ Among the examples she considers, Ahmed succinctly captures the affective economy happening in an encounter between a white gaze and a black body. The black body, after being taken in by the white gaze, shivers, and yet is misread as a raging body. This "(mis)reading" then become the "ground" of fear, as if the black body is a threat, a source of fear. It is in fact quite the opposite that the raging/fearsome label is attached to the black body in order to maintain a distance between the two bodies. Moreover, the label can become increasingly "sticky" as more denigrating elements are attached to it. Jonah's fear is of course referring to his reverence to YHWH. Yet, he is also creating a discourse while he is encountering the great storm and answering the questions from the sailors. Jonah is probably trying to make a distinction between what he and the sailors fear. While the sailors fear for their lives, Jonah does not fear death, he only fear YHWH, the God of heaven. As such, Jonah sets up a hierarchy in which those who worship YHWH are more pleasing in YHWH's sight than those who only turn to YHWH in times of need. Jonah finishes his discourse by proclaiming a God that seeks justice (or thirsts for human sacrifice) and making the sailors so execute the sacrificial act. Out of the fear for their life, the sailors throw Jonah off the boat, but they also gain a label that characterizes them as murderers. In terms of Ahmed's affect theory, Jonah's discourse appeals to its audience by attaching feelings of disgust and fear onto the sailors, propagandizing the idea that they will be potential threat to the people of God. They are disgusting because they will do whatever it takes to survive. They are fearful because they might kill you to do just that.

The affective investment does not stay on a single group. It circulates just as the discourse about the similar kind of people is being circulated. We first encounter the sailors in the book, and now we are brought to face another group of non-YHWH worshippers, namely the Assyrians. The audience is first introduced to the Assyrian wickedness that has already gone up before YHWH (בִּי־עֲלֹתָהּ רָעָתָם לְפָנָי; Jon 1:2). The language evokes an imagery of burnt offering

⁷ Sara Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd revised edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 10. Ahmed explicitly makes a distinction between Silvan Tomkins' and her affect theories. While Tomkins, basing himself on an inside-out model of emotions, posits that emotions work like a contagion, passing from a person to others, Ahmed argues that emotions are not something a person possesses, but that through emotions surfaces or boundaries are made, especially surfaces or boundaries of the body.

⁸ Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 63.

(עלה), and yet what is “offered up” is disgust. Uriel Simon points out that “[t]he subject, ‘their wickedness,’ echoes the language used about the generation of the Flood” (Gen 6:5), and that “[t]he predicate ‘has come up before me’ recapitulates God’s words about Sodom” (Gen 18:11).⁹ I do not think Simon is joining Jonah’s team to create a malevolent discourse against the Assyrians. What he is trying to do is to point out the possible references of the language that the book of Jonah is using. However, if the references are indeed readily perceivable, Jonah can surely incorporate them into his discourse, making the Assyrians to join the wicked generation of the Flood and the Sodomites. Although Jonah’s audience/followers may be surprised by the Assyrians’ quick repentance and showing of remorse (Jon 3:5-9), a discourse in its Foucauldian sense will always find a way to adapt and rewind back to its main narrative that Assyrians among other evil people were and will always be violent and oppressive. This is also because Jonah and his followers have deposited so much disgust and fear on the Assyrians and the like that not even facts concerning their repentance can change their perception about them.

The Chosen Trauma in Jonah’s Discourse

Foucault among other French poststructuralists always keep check on how governments and the privileged control their objects. Ancient Israelites, however, has never been on the top of game when it comes to international power struggle in the ancient world. In fact, Israelites has long been suffering from the trauma that is inflicted by the Assyrian and later Babylonian empires. Although it is difficult (or perhaps unnecessary) to date the book of Jonah, we can still assume that the readers or audience of the later generations are deposited with a transgenerational trauma from their parents and grandparents. The generation that had gone through imperial oppression and displacement usually suffers from “narrative wreckage” where they have serious issue in making sense of what has happened and what will the future holds.¹⁰ While the traumatized generation had been stripped off every control of their life, they still retain the power to reconstruct their version of the story and pass it onto the later generations. This retelling and transmission of their traumatized experience to a certain extent may well be a case of a “chosen trauma.” According to Vamik Volkan, “a chosen trauma is a large group’s mental representation of a historic event that resulted in collective feelings of helplessness, victimization, shame, and humiliation at the hands of ‘others,’ and typically involves drastic losses of people, land, prestige, and dignity.”¹¹ It is usually when there is a threat, imaginary or actual, posted by “other,” the current generation will resort to the chosen trauma that is originated from their ancestor to consolidate their “we-ness” and face the threat. If there are political ideologies and power dynamics involved in the process of “transmission” or perhaps indoctrination, story-retelling would become a discourse in Foucauldian sense. The leader(s) of the traumatized community or the author(s) of the discourse seek to arouse their followers to take actions in the name of a threat against the “we-ness.” It is indeed a survival tactics for the subjugated people to protect the integrity of one’s identity. Volkan also points out that the character of the leaders, reparative or destructive, will determine how the transgenerational

⁹ Simon, *Jonah*, 4-5.

¹⁰ Danna Nolan Fewell, “A Broken Hallelujah: Remembering David, Justice, and the Cost of the House,” in *The Fate of King David: The Past and Present of a Biblical Icon*, eds. Tod Linafelt, Claudia V. Camp and Timothy Beal (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 105-106.

¹¹ Vamik Volkan, *Killing in the Name of Identity: A Study of Bloody Conflicts* (Charlottesville: Pitchstone, 2006), 173.

trauma be passed on. A reparative leader aims to strengthen the threatened group identity without attacking or dehumanizing another group. In contrast, a destructive leader can be manipulative and run a “propaganda machine” in order to secure his or her power and leadership. Destructive leaders will emphasize on a shared sense of victimization within the large group while facing any threat from another group. They will reactivate a chosen trauma, thereby reinforcing the “we-ness” of the group. They then dehumanize or even demonize the source of the threat. Finally they succeed in creating some entitlement for any aggressive action.¹² Another issue that may complicate any transgenerational transmission of trauma is time collapse. When a destructive leader reactivates a chosen trauma, he or she may link the current threat, imaginary or real, with an ancient enemy, ignoring the differences in time and context. Time collapse is to create another entitlement for a group of people and its leader to eliminate any current threat from an opposing group. Since the ancient enemy that is linked to the rival group had victimized the ancestors of the traumatized group, now it is time for the descendants of the latter to repay the victimization.¹³ While we may not be able to determine whether Jonah and his associates are reparative or destructive leaders, their discourse concerning the sailors, the Assyrians and the like can potentially be turned into something destructive. This also allows us to understand better why YHWH’s pardon for the Assyrians has done a great evil to Jonah (וַיִּרַע אֱלֹהֵי-יוֹנָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָהּ; Jon 4:1), and why Jonah would rather die than live. Since the identity or “we-ness” of Jonah and his community is revived through reconstructing their chosen trauma, the Assyrians’ repentance, their resulting deliverance from YHWH’s destruction and the idea that they will continue to thrive send Jonah back to the trauma second time. If he and his people are going to die in the future because of the Assyrians’ revival, he apparently would prefer YHWH to take his life now.

Aside from sabotaging the Assyrian’ revival, what would Jonah hope to achieve? What would an Israelite revival look like? *Pirquei de-Rabbi Eli‘ezer*, a 9th century haggadic-midrashic work that is ascribed to Rabbi Eli‘ezer ben Hyrcanus, has reconstructed the backstory of Jonah in chapter 10 (*PRE* 10). He contends that Jonah has restored the border of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 14:25) on God’s first commission but is being called “a lying prophet” after God has changed God’s mind not to destroy Israel on God’s second commission.¹⁴ It is thus the third commission when God sent Jonah to Nineveh. *PRE* 10 portrays Jonah as reluctant as in the biblical book but provides a couple reasons: (1) if he goes, he will become notorious lying prophet not just to the Israelites, but to the nations of the world because he knows the Assyrians would repent; (2) as the Assyrians repent, God “will direct [God’s] anger against Israel.”¹⁵ Therefore, Jonah’s fleeing from God’s commission would essentially lead to the destruction of Nineveh, and give Israel an opportunity to repent and survive. In a similar vein, early church fathers also maintain that Jonah flees because of “his knowledge that the Gentiles’ belief would occasion Israel’s downfall, his fear of being branded a false prophet, or his recognition that the Ninevites’ repentance would reflect poorly on impenitent Israel.”¹⁶ These interpretations to certain extent reflects the same

¹² Volkan, *Killing in the Name of Identity*, 184.

¹³ Volkan, *Killing in the Name of Identity*, 183.

¹⁴ Gerald Friedlander, *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer: (the chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great) according to the Test of the Manuscript belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1916), 65; 20 July, 2018 <<https://archive.org/details/pirkderabbieli00frieuoft>>.

¹⁵ Friedlander, *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer*, 66.

¹⁶ Fuhrmann and Helft, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, s.v. “Jonah (Book and Person),” 581.

kind of binary mentality that Jonah's discourse has been propagating. A zero-sum game at its core turns people that are outside the circle of "we-ness" into a threat that has to be neutralized.

An Alternative Narrative

The discourse that Jonah and his associates create and propagandize, however, is not the only discourse in the book of Jonah. As I have posit at the beginning of this paper, there is another narrative that is in constant dialogue with Jonah's discourse. If I said the dialogic partner with Jonah's discourse is one that convey a universalistic message, my reading would just be another binary oversimplification of the book. If I contrasted Jonah's discourse concerning the survival/revival of the "we-ness" with YHWH's mercy and pardon on the oppressor, it would also be an oversimplified binary reading. To get a better handle on the other narrative, we start with an alternative portrayal of God, יהוה-אלהים to be exact (Jon 4:6). Simon admits that "[t]here is no ready explanation why here and here alone do we find the compound name of the Deity."¹⁷ Neither could we assign each part of the compound epithet to a certain set of divine characters without falling into binary opposition again. Therefore, I turn to employ the affect theory proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as a hermeneutical tool. Two specific concepts, namely "Body without Organs" (BwO) and war machine," are crucial in my attempt to construct an alternative view of God in the book of Jonah.

In Deleuzian and Guattarian terms, "Body without Organs" (BwO) challenges "the organizing principles that structure, define and speak on behalf of the collective assemblage of organs, experiences or states of being."¹⁸ BwO opposes any fixed "organization" of organs, and focuses on the interconnections between organs, that is, the flows of intensities, forces, waves with variable amplitudes from one organ to another.¹⁹ BwO does not refer to an organ-less body, but is "defined by the *temporary and provisional presence* of determinate organs."²⁰ These organs changes over time as the flows or forces change along the time, rendering individual organ indistinguishable from another. In other words, organs in BwO are polyvalent. If the "organizing principles" are to strengthen the boundaries and "territorialize" every organ in a body, BwO is to "deterritorialize" any assemblage that exploits or oppresses. The polyvalent nature of organs in BwO is part and parcel to the process of deterritorialization. The polyvalent organs that connect with one another is also called a "machine."²¹ Various connections form and rupture at their opportune moments. When a machine deterritorializes or reterritorializes another, it is functioning as a "war machine."²² As Stephen Moore rightly points out, "the war machine is not necessarily, or not only, a machine for war ... 'the machine does indeed encounter war ... now directed against the State and against the worldwide axiomatic expressed by States.'²³

¹⁷ Simon, *Jonah*, 41.

¹⁸ Adrian Parr, ed., *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Revised edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 38, s.v. "Body without Organs."

¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 41; B. H. McLean, "The Embodied Interpreter: Deleuze and Guattari," in *Biblical Interpretation and Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 292.

²⁰ Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 42.

²¹ McLean, "The Embodied Interpreter," 280.

²² McLean, "The Embodied Interpreter," 280.

²³ Stephen Moore, "The Messiah Who Screamed," *the Fifteenth Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquium* (Unpublished Presentation Paper, 2016), 6.

There are times when the “State” or “the worldwide axiomatic expressed by States” becomes a form of “organization” that maintains only the status quo of the privileged and exploits others for its selfish gain. A war machine, whether it is an inanimate thing, an animal, a divine council, a person or an assemblage of two or more entities, is thus to blur or even disrupt the boundaries of social structures, moral axiom, and the like. Nevertheless, the flow of intensities in an interconnected network of machines is not necessarily a reversal of what is previously happening. The example of the interaction between an orchid and a wasp illustrates the process of forming and rupturing the in-between connection.²⁴ At one point, the wasp is a “receiver” of pollen and its identity changes as part of the orchid, namely the pollen, is attached to it. In Deleuzoguattarian terms, the wasp is deterritorialized, or the orchid has reterritorialized the wasp. However, this connection and the in-between flow is not mechanical and unilateral. The wasp could have been deterritorialized by other species and in turns reterritorialized the orchid. Thus, the wasp-machine must not always to be viewed as mere receiver. A machine is by nature a multiplicity, that is, constantly changing, a mode of becoming.

Through Deleuzoguattarian lens I read the compound epithet יהוה-אַלֵּהִים as a divine “machine” which by nature connects with other machines, and forms an assemblage, a BwO. The divine machine connects with various subjects, namely human, animals, insects, vegetation, and natural phenomena. Although the divine appointing actions (וַיִּמָּן; Jon 2:1; 4:6, 7, 8) infer a hierarchical relation between a subject with a higher authority and its subordinates, the connections that God makes are not unilateral but rhizomic. The obvious evidence is that the divine machine is deterritorialized and changes its mission from annihilation to preservation when the Ninevites and their animals are deterritorialized by and respond to Jonah’s preaching. As Jonah becomes angry with “the great evil” that was done to him (וַיִּרַע אֶל-יוֹנָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָה; Jon 4:1), YHWH reterritorializes him by appointing a ricinus plant, a worm and quiet east wind (רִיחַ קָדִים חַרְיִשִּׁית; Jon 4:8) and connecting them with Jonah. While some readers or audience would see Jonah camping at the eastside of the city as a protest against God’s change of mind and speculate that Jonah has nothing but the worst wishes to the city, his concern for the ricinus plant (קִיקְיֹון; Jon 4:6) reflects how he is somehow benefited from it and offers an alternative meaning to its growth. Conventional interpretations render the ricinus plant as a metaphor that invokes Jonah’s and the audience’s compassion for the Ninevites. Such metaphor may not cover all the possible traits that the Ninevites possess, but the meaning(s) of the signifier could certainly be expanded within reasonable context(s). The issue at stake through the deleuzoguattarian lens is the interconnectedness between יהוה-אַלֵּהִים, Jonah and his people, the Ninevites, the sailors, the ricinus plant, the worm, the great fish (דָּג גְּדוֹל), and the quiet east wind. All these entities form a BwO in which different components connect with one another in various manners in every single time. Even though two of the same components connect more than one occasion, each of them could perform different roles and functions. The problem with Jonah’s discourse is that it fixes the roles of each party in the relationship and becomes prone to exploitation. However, the oppressed can become an oppressing machine after they manage to survive and gain power. Even in the midst of being oppressed, the leaders of the oppressed community could simultaneously be oppressive to the underprivileged within their own. The concept of BwO

²⁴ McLean, “The Embodied Interpreter,” 281–82.

challenges that no single narrative should have the final word in any circumstance. The divine machine goes through deterritorialization and reterritorialization just as other machines do in the BwO. Therefore, as we emphasize God's mercy at this moment, it does not promote cheap grace that simply let go those who are held accountable for their violence. The survival or revival of Jonah's community may at one point depend on the loosening control or even the fall of the empire. Yet at another time, the raise of the empire may well be beneficial to the revival of Jewish community.

The Book of Jonah and Revival of Global Methodism

How is the above conversation relevant to the revival of Global Methodism? An article written by Robert J. Harman in 2012 states that United Methodist Church is growing in mainly in Africa and Asia, while the U.S. membership has dropped to 7.8 million in 2009.²⁵ In light of the bishop's proposal for increasing the U.S. membership, Harman raises a couple important questions regarding the nature of UMC in the U.S.,

Is the United Methodist Church primarily an American Protestant denomination with extensions overseas? Or is it a worldwide communion in which every natural particularity is submerged for the sake of a common witness?²⁶

Harman also mentions that the declining membership, in the bishop's opinion, may "threatens the church's ability to sustain and strengthen the church's growing global ministry."²⁷ If the revival of the Methodist church is all about the number and size and its global influence (or dominance?), it is not difficult to imagine how the leaders of the church would formulate a discourse that centers around the threat and the consequence if the church fails to respond. It is perfectly understandable for the leaders of the church to see the matter from an institutional perspective and work out a solution that favors the development of the institution and its leaders and members. But when a discourse ties the church's membership with its participation in global ministry, it may end up like the one that Jonah and his people have created and propagated. If global ministry, not religious colonization, is the church's mission, she can still connect with UMCs in other countries around the globe and work together toward a common goal. The declining number and size may render the UMC in the U.S. less influential in the global village. It may be more difficult for the church in the U.S. to persuade others to follow its agenda. Yet the UMCs in different countries should not be competing for higher number and larger size with one another. We are simply not rivals to one another.

The relationship between Jonah's community and the Assyrians is obviously not analogous to the one between UMCs in the U.S. and in other parts of the world. But the way to consider one's revival in relation to others' is not entirely different. Jonah's community perceives the Assyrian revival as a threat to theirs, but the book of Jonah goes about the issue from a different route, acknowledging the complexity and interconnectedness among various machines in the BwO. In the case of the revival of global Methodism, instead of depending on a

²⁵ Robert J. Harman, "Can United Methodism Restructure Itself? A Global Identity," *Christian Century* (April 4, 2012), 30.

²⁶ Harman, "Can United Methodism Restructure Itself?" 30.

²⁷ Harman, "Can United Methodism Restructure Itself?" 30.

central machine that could take up the leading (dominating?) role for revival, or reviving the dying machine that used to be leading, perhaps opportunities of revival would come from outside one's institutional boundaries.

Conclusion

This paper has employed a few poststructuralist and trauma theories as a reading strategy to understand better the struggle that Jonah and his people are going through. While Jonah's community are still struggling to survive under the influence of empire, YHWH's pardon on the Ninevites sends them back to their chosen trauma. It is thus understandable for them to create and circulate a discourse to cope with the unconceivable divine action. To Jonah and his community, the Ninevites represent the enemies that threaten their survival. Whenever the enemies thrive, they suffer. Yet the book of Jonah presents an alternative outlook that surpasses the binary worldview that Jonah creates and propagates. The alternative(s) is not necessarily the opposite of particularism. It is a rhizomic network in which various machines come together at different times for a common goal. One's revival does not necessarily pose threat to another, but may be considered as part of the shared success. It is a "Body without Organs" that allows multiple yet different voices to coexist. After all, if we are part of the BwO, some parts of "us" have deterritorialized the others, while some parts of the others have reterritorialized "us." The concept and boundaries of "we-ness" then become blurry, and we are interconnected with others. As such, revival should not be a competition with strangers or enemies. Having said that, I do not mean to ignore the violence that has been done to the marginalized and underprivileged in the name of utopian common goal. Jonah's discourse remains valid in times when the people in power overstep and seek to serve their own gain.