Foreskins, Foreigners and Foes:
The Philistines and the Creation of the Colonial Other

John McDonagh

John McDonagh recently completed his PhD in post-colonialism at the University of Warwick and is now a lecturer in the Department of English at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick.

[john.mcdonagh@mic.ul.ie]

Introduction

In 1991, Ron Atkinson publicly pledged his future to his then employers, Sheffield Wednesday Football Club, announcing he would be "barmy"[1] to leave. Needless to say in a long tradition of football managers he resigned as manager the following week to take over at Aston Villa, an act of such perceived betrayal that a local newspaper ran a banner headline with a single word printed in bold letters above a picture of the errant manager - 'JUDAS'. In response to this, Brendan Kennelly has written, 'Judas was in no position to write a protesting letter to that newspaper. How must men and women who cannot write back, who must absorb the full thump of accusation without reply, who have no voices because they are 'beyond hope', feel in their cold, condemned silence?' [2]. Kennelly attempted just such a response with his brilliant *Book of Judas* (1991) in which he voices Judas Iscariot and allows him to respond to centuries of censure where his name has been a byword for a particularly hurtful and underhand form of betrayal. While Judas has found a source of potential redemption in the work of Kennelly, no such luxury has been afforded to the Philistines, a cultured, sea-fearing race who settled in Canaan during the 13th and 12th centuries BCE. Their name has also entered the lexicon of mute shame, ranking alongside the Barbarians[3] as the personification of the outsider, epitomising an ignorance of clearly delineated and deliberately exclusive cultural signifiers. The Philistines entered this pantheon of *the other* as a

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[1] www.allsports.com/fapremiership/sheffieldwednesday/archive/votingold1.html, p.1.

[2] Brendan Kennelly, *The Book of Judas* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1991), p.10.

[3] The Barbarians originated in the Near East migrating their way across the continents of Asia and Europe. Known in later generations as the Indo-Aryan people, some of them settled in the regions of the Caucasus mountains and of Persia (present-day Iran); others in the fertile crescent of Mesopotamia, Philistia, and Sumeria; yet others in what is now known as the Balkan states of Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Romania, and others into the lands of Northern Europe into what is now present-day Germany, Scandinavia, France, Spain, and Britain.

direct result of the challenge they posed to the burgeoning Hebrew nation and it is entirely consistent that their name has been used from biblical times to distinguish between those who set the social, cultural and political. agendas and those who stand irredeemably outside the ideologies created to facilitate the rationalisation of the nation space. In the Bible it can be surmised that the Philistines are the seminal other, the model outsiders whose sole textual function is to plot the destruction of civilisation and whose activities provide crucial nodes of justification for the creation and expansion of the nation of Israel. The demonic Philistines fulfil a role that was later to be played, amongst others, by Africans, Indians, Aboriginals and Irish in the construction of the great colonial edifice of otherness, and was a role ironically played out to tragic effect by the Jews themselves over centuries of ethnic persecution and alienation.

The Arnoldian Legacy

In *Culture and Anarchy*, a seminal treatise on the state of England published in 1868, Matthew Arnold coined what became the popular usage of the term Philistine, namely what Chris Baldrick defines as 'a person devoted narrow-mindedly to material prosperity at the expense of intellectual and artistic awareness; or (as an adjective) ignorantly uninterested in culture and ideas' [4]. While acknowledging that 'this attempt at a scientific nomenclature falls very far short in precision of what might be required from a writer equipped with a complete and coherent philosophy'[5], Arnold divided contemporary English society into three somewhat overlapping groupings, namely Barbarians (the aristocratic class), the Philistines (the middle-classes) and the Populace (the working class). The Liberal English bourgeoisie are labelled as Philistine, the latter giving 'the notion of something particularly stiff-necked and perverse in the resistance to light'[6], and the light motif and the Philistines fear of its illuminative qualities runs throughout the work. The Philistine constantly retreats from the *light* of a restorative culture, secure in the darkness of a rigid and utilitarian world view which is resistant to both internal unease and external enlightenment. Arnold's subjective, unreferenced and somewhat sarcastic use of the term cannot belie the fact that largely as a result of his endeavours the word Philistine has entered the lexicon of cultural essentialisation, a people whose travails and genocidal experiences at the hands of the Israelites are reduced to what Arnold refers to as self-

[4] Chris Baldrick, *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.167.
[5] J. Dover Wilson (ed.), *Matthew Arnold. Culture and Anarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 105.
[6] Ibid., p.101.

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affirming reflections on 'the things of itself and not its real self'[7]. However, Arnold's use of the term Philistine (and indeed the term Barbarian) highlights the complexities involved in the attempted definition of the other, namely the reflexive nature of the nomenclature of identification. Built into the concept of the other is a veiled acknowledgement of the presence of the other in the self, apparently polarised opposites physically co-existing at the margins and indeed co-defining each other within the intellectual parameters of colonial discourse, albeit perameters drawn by the dominant partner. The Israelites could not define themselves without the Philistines, therefore the very people portrayed as epitomising the potential nemesis of the people of Israel are themselves forming their adversaries through their very existence. The Bible, therefore, fulfils the classical criteria of colonialist literature by allowing the Israelites to denigrate Philistine culture at every turn, engaging in what Adbul JanMohamed refers to as 'an obsessive, fetishistic representation of the native's moral inferiority'[8] which, by contrast, increases 'the store of his own moral superiority'. JanMohamed argues that this self-perpetuating cycle of cultural and moral denigration allows the dominant power to accrue 'surplus morality', which is then fed directly back into the negative portrayal of the other. Consequently, the behaviour of the Philistines has to be portrayed in the Bible on a continual downward moral spiral of betrayal, slaughter and inherent untrustworthiness, a pattern of behaviour that concurrently establishes the moral authority of the Israelites. This essentialisation of the Philistines results in their inability to end this self-sustaining cycle and given the fact that the originary narrative drive emanates from the Israelite perspective their double bind appears inextricably constructed.

In Judges 13:1-5[9], the Philistines make an early biblical appearance as the nemesis of the people of Israel, significantly identified by Samson as the 'uncircumcised' (Judges 15:19). This nomenclature clearly identifies the Philistines as non-Semitic, characterised not by their inherent generic traits but by their difference to the chosen people of Yahweh. Indeed, their appearance is directly as a result of the Israelites behaving in an undisclosed manner that 'displeases Yahweh' (Judges 13:1) and throughout the books of the Old Testament the Philistines are regularly held out as the ultimate external punishment if the Israelites should in any way depart from Yahweh's interpreted wishes. Although the exact cause of the conflict between the Israelites and the Philistines remains largely unexplained, it would appear that disputes over land form the basis of the

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[7] Arnold, p.105.
[8] Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory' in Ashcroft B., Griffiths, B. and Tiffin, H. (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (Routledge: London, 1995), p.23.
[9] Taken from *The Jerusalem Bible* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1968). All subsequent biblical references will be from this edition.

difficulties between them, although these disputes are rarely explicitly referred to. The primary function of the Philistines, therefore, is to act as a cultural mirror to the chosen people, anonymous outsiders whose essential barbarism reflects the inherent superiority of the Israelites and this carefully constructed Philistine model of otherness provides the Israelites with a crucial objective correlative upon which to base emerging notions of a collective identity. In his 1882 treatise on nationhood, Ernest Renan identified a 'heroic past'[10] as an essential composite element of what he refers to as the 'spiritual principle' that is a 'nation' and he clearly foregrounds the galvanising effects of shared memories of 'suffering' over the more ethereal concepts of identifiable unitary experiences. This ephemeral national spirit is predicated upon common 'glories' identifiable in the past and an essential element in this construct is the identifiable oppositional intrinsically evil other whose actions elicit the required responses that will crystallise in the national consciousness. The Philistines, largely anonymous enemies and repeatedly referred to in the collective sense, perform this precise function in the world created by the authors of the books of the Old Testament. Their story is textually irrelevant and their very cultural anonymity is essential if the chosen people are to form any sense of their own identity. The role of the Philistines in the story of Israel can be seen as the progenitor of the experience of a variety of colonised groups whose textual existence is predicated on the perspective of the dominant socio-cultural forces operating within the colonial paradigm.

The consequences of such forces can be devastating, resulting in what Ngugi Wa Thiong'o refers to as the 'internalisation'[11] of negative cultural imagery to the degree that cultures become liminal and incapable of self-definition. When this situation emerges, complex cultural constructions are diluted to reductionist clichés and labels whilst an entire people can become a byword for those perceived to fall outside the artificially created socio-cultural standards of the dominant hegemonic petty-bourgeois consensus. Indeed, the travails of the Philistines fulfil one of Homi K. Bhabha's ideological conditions regarding the formation of the 'political unity of the nation'[12] in that their very existence at the border of the Kingdom of Israel facilitated the creation of the 'signifying space' within which a burgeoning concept of Israelite self and nationhood began to crystallise. However, it would be an over-simplification of such a multi-layered, chronologically-extended and pseudopygraphied text such

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[10] Ernest Renan, 'What Is a Nation?' in Homi K. Bhabha, (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), pps. 8-23 (p.19).

[11] Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind* (James Curry: London, 1986), p. 18.

[12] Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (Routledge,: London, 1990), p.300.

as the Bible to circumscribe a perspective of the Philistines as the original Other, despite the ample evidence for such an interpretation. In his book *Intimate Enemy*, Ashis Nandy identifies a crucial weakness in the post-colonial binary of self and other, namely the inability of historians or theorists to identify what he refers to as the 'non-players'[13], those individuals or groups who do not easily fit into either the category of the colonised or the coloniser and whose political affiliations undermine the nomenclature of definition. One such 'non-player' is Ittai of Gath, a Philistine whose uncommon and unexpected declaration of loyalty to the Israelite King David (2 Sam. 15:18-23) acts as a crucial correlative to the relentless duality of the Book of Samuel. He and his six hundred Gittites (residents of the Philistine city of Gath) pledge their allegiance to the leader of their traditional enemies, further exposing the other within the other that undermines the potentially overbearing portrayal of the binary; such an episode is a crucial step in the attempted unravelling of the nature of apparent polarisations. The importance of such textual incidents is expressed by the leading exponent of Subaltern Studies, Ranajit Guha :

Blinded by the glare of a perfect and immaculate consciousness the historian sees nothing, for instance, but solidarity in rebel behaviour and fails to notice its Other, namely betrayal.[14]

It is, however, part of the overall trend of the biblical Philistine portrayal that the non-player defects from the Philistines to the Israelites and not vice-versa, thereby providing further proof of the moral and cultural superiority of the latter over the former. It is certainly arguable that it is only when this betrayal occurs from the self to the other that a text can be perceived as potentially undermining its pre-eminent ideologies.

David and Goliath: The Myth of National Imaginings

Throughout the 188 references[15] to the Philistines in the Old Testament, they are generally portrayed in a manner reminiscent of the stereotype of the 'Indians' in early, post-politically-correct Hollywood westerns, ready at all times to upset the civilised advance of a clearly superior, recognisable and identifiable culture. However, there are significant individual examples which merit close examination because in their deconstruction lies the origins of their cultural exclusion. Only three Philistines are portrayed in any textual depth in the books of the Old

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[13] Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy - Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.xiv.

[14] Ranajit Guha, 'The Prose of Counter Insurgency' in *Subaltern Studies*, Vol.2, pps. 1-42, (p.40).

[15] These 188 reference are taken from the *NIV Study Bible Complete Library* search engine.

Testament, the first being King Abimelech who swears an oath with Abraham at Beersheba (Gen. 21:27), an episode that is described in *NJBC* as a moment when 'the pagan king acknowledges the divine origin of Abraham's material success'[16], immediately establishing the ultimate Philistine authority as secondary to that of the chosen people represented by Abraham. It is not until the Books of Samuel, however, that the Philistines emerge as the true nemesis of the people of Israel, their constant threatening presence galvanising the often-shaky monarchies of Saul and David. The clear inference in 1 Samuel is that of the divine nature of the army of Israel[17] and its battles, ably supported by Philistine cannon fodder. It is, however, only on the later appearance of Goliath (1 Sam 17) that a fuller, more recognisable model of Philistine otherness and implied colonial Israelite superiority begins to emerge. David, the iconic future King of Israel, first comes to prominence by offering his services to Saul as the only Israelite combatant ready to face Goliath, a giant Philistine 'shock-trooper' (1 Sam. 17:4) measuring 'six cubits and one span tall' (17:5), corresponding roughly to an equivalent of ten feet and three inches tall[18], a remarkable and scarcely credible height. The setting for this epic battle is a town called Socoh described in *NJBC* as 'the frontier land between Israel and Philistia', evocative of a biblical *High Noon* in which David exemplifies that 1952 film's byline, 'The story of a man who was too proud to run'[19]. The frontier is a traditional setting for conflict, the boundary between the civilised known world and the mysterious land of the outsider, at once exotically mysterious and threateningly forboding, and the Bible certainly has played a very significant role in the creation of the liminal border as a site of cultural, economic and political friction.

Throughout the books of the Old Testament, the land beyond the border of Israel evokes the territorial manifestation of the other. For example, in Joshua, the land ascribed to the people of Judah is bordered by 'the wilderness of Zin' (Josh. 15:1) while the 'portion awarded' (Josh. 17:1-5) to Manasseh, the son of Joseph, includes 'the wilderness that goes up from Jericho'. Again, in Numbers, when the Israelites leave their own territory they encounter 'the wilderness that borders Moab' (Num. 21:11) while the land of the Amorites is also accredited as a wilderness, bounded by desert and salt-sea. Indeed, this literary portrayal of Israel as a moral,

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[16] R.E. Brown, J.A. Fitzmyer and R.E. Murphy, (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary.* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992), p.22. This edition will be referred to as *NJBC.*
[17] ibid., p.165.
[18] *The Oxford English Dictionary* (on line) measures the Roman Cubit at 17.4 inches and the Egyptian Cubit at 20.6 inches while a span measures an average of 9 inches. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (p.171) places Goliath's height at 'about 10ft'.
[19] Taken from http://www.filmsite.org/high.html

cultural and physical oasis is explicitly expressed in Malachi when Yahweh, venting his anger against Esau, announces that 'I turned his towns into a wilderness and his heritage into desert pastures' (Ml, 1:2-5) while any land outside the land of Israel 'shall be known as Unholy Land', thereby firmly cementing the link between land and the nation, confirming Bhabha's assertion of the territoriality of tradition.

The choosing of single combat as a means of resolving a conflict was 'not unheard of in Old Testament times' (*NJBC*, p.171) and the portrayal of David standing alone against the Philistine giant at the edge of civilisation is a powerful image of original national imagining, the classic icon of the personification of a national ideal galvanised by the necessary presence of the ultimate threat to that ideal. David's combat with Goliath is without doubt one of the Old Testament's most recognisable single events and the victory of the future Israelite king against seemingly overwhelming odds is a scenario that can be found in the cultural mythologies of nearly every ethnic grouping.

Goliath's grotesque height clearly identifies the Philistines as capable of producing genetic freaks, a fact attested to by the appearance of yet another physically unusual Philistine at the battle of Gath, 'a man of huge stature with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in all' (1 Chr. 20:6) who is coincidentally slain by Jonathan, David's nephew. Goliath's physical advantages are supplemented by elaborate descriptions of his armour in which his entire body appears to be covered in bronze, suggestive perhaps of some latent fear of the indomitable Israelites. These descriptions serve to highlight the impending impossibility of combat with such a warrior and are classically constructed to merely heighten the perception of the nature of David's inevitable victory. In stark contrast to Goliath's fearsome appearance David is described as 'a youth, a boy of fresh complexion and pleasant bearing' (1 Sam. 17:42), implying a clear ethnographic divide between the Israelites and the Philistines. This is a typical colonial textual construction in which the other, in this case Goliath, manifests physical features that are simultaneously grotesque and supernatural. As with the description of Celtic heroes, Goliath's weaponry appears almost superhuman (described in the *NJBC*, p.171, as 'not typical'), his spear the thickness of 'a weaver's beam' and the head alone weighing in at 'six hundred shekels of iron' (1 Sam. 17:6-7). This portrayal fits neatly into what Benita Parry refers to as 'the wide range of stereotypes and the shifting subject positions assigned to the colonised in the colonialised

text[20] with Goliath's massive frame representing the impenetrability of the Philistines while David's fresh features simultaneously suggest a purer form of genetic inheritance and an implied tactical nouse. However, a problem with the standard portrayal of the colonised other arises with the very weaponry that Goliath parades before the terrified Israelites. In a typical colonialist construct, the technological advantages of the colonisers are foregrounded to suggest the immutability of their dominance, clearly superior and sophisticated weapons coolly facing up to unsophisticated fanaticism, implying the inevitable victory of science over passion. However, Goliath's weapons place him in a very different league to his Israelite opponents, an acknowledgement made by the authors of the Books of Samuel of the historically accepted superiority of Philistine iron work[21] of the time. His technological supremacy, therefore, would appear to give him a distinct advantage over David whose rejection of Saul's armour prior to the upcoming combat merely adds to the created narrative tension.

The righteousness of David's cause, therefore, is also explicitly implied by his lack of armour in that he states that the only protection he will need is the 'name of Yahweh Sabaoth' (1 Sam. 17:45) and the relative simplicity of his sling and 'five smooth stones from the river bed' (1 Sam. 17:40) if anything emphasises the barbarity of Goliath, thereby cleverly portraying technological supremacy as an implied evil. Goliath's great size and weaponry ultimately count for nothing in the combat and his threat to feed David's flesh 'to the birds of the air and the beats of the field' (1 Sam. 17:44) only serves to highlight Philistine arrogance which is depicted as clearly inferior to the steely will of the divinely inspired David. He castigates Goliath for coming only with 'sword and spear and javelin' (1 Sam. 17:45) while he brings his faith, his belief in an order that clearly does not include the Philistines in its cosmic view. This exchange is a crucial and definitive enunciation of the nature of the biblical other with Goliath exposed as fatally ignorant of the divine will which will overcome whatever physical or material obstacles are placed in its path. The nature of the Philistine's otherness, therefore, is dictated by their denial of the power of Yahweh and their continued attempts at usurping the power of Israel. They personify the arrogance of denying the power of Yahweh, while the Israelites ironically personify the parallel arrogance of unshakeable belief. In fact Yahweh's interventions against the Philistines are portrayed in certain passages of the Old Testament as more than mere Davidian evocations of divine assistance. In I Chron. 1:14, for example,

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[20] Benita Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse' in Ashcroft B., Griffiths, G. and Tiffin, H., (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* London: Routledge, 1995), pps. 36-45, p.41.

[21] For an examination of the Philistine tradition, see http://www.bge.nl.en.articles.filist1.html.

the Philistines square up to the Israelites once again on hearing of the accession of David to the throne and a battle is prepared for at Rephaim. The usual narrative structure of these battles is for David to ask for Yahweh's general and covert help ('Will you deliver them into my power?' I Chr. 14:10) which invariably materialises in the form of a Philistine massacre. However, at Rephaim, after an initial victory for David, the Philistines rally for a second round of combat, prompting Yahweh to give David an unusually elaborate and specific series of instructions:

> Do not attack them from the front; go round and engage them opposite the balsam trees. When you hear the sound of steps in the tops of the balsam trees, launch your attack, for that will God going out ahead of you to rout the army of the Philistines (1 Chron. 14: 14-15).

Clearly in this particular encounter Yahweh has seen fit to depart from his typical interventionist *modus operandi*, namely that of promising without specifying the means the deliverance of the Philistines into the hands of the Israelites. His specific instructions to David explicitly leads the Philistines to their destruction, the peculiar narrative motif of the sound of footsteps acting as the mark of divine intervention. As is typical of the aftermath of Philistine/Israelite battles, punitive raids are carried out on Philistine positions with the chroniclers listing the enormous resultant casualties with barely concealed glee. Edward Said notes a chilling echo of this post-combat punitive slaughter when recounting the nature of French military *'riazzas'* in Algeria in the 1840's, what he translates as 'punitive raids on Algerians' villages, their homes, harvests, women and children'[22]. According to Said, these raids formed 'the core of French military policy' and were justified by one General Changarnier on the basis that 'this type of activity is taught by the scriptures...in which Joshua and other great leaders conducted 'de bien terribles *razzias*' and were blessed by God'. The consequences of such actions are brutally outlined by Said in which 'ruin, total destruction and uncompromising brutality are condoned not only because legitimised by God but because, in words echoed and re-echoed from Bugeauad to Salan, 'les Arabes ne comprennant que la force brutale'[23], an attitude that can arguably find its origins in David's valedictory psalm in 2 Sam 22:

> I pursue my enemies and destroy them,
> nor turn back till an end is made of them;

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[22] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), p.220.

[23] Said is quoting from *L'Algerie: Nation et Societe* (Paris: Seuil, 1982) by Mostafa Lacheraf in *Culture and Imperialism*, p.220. The quotation can be roughly translated as 'the Arabs only understand brute force'.

> I strike them down, and they do not rise,
> they fall, they are under my feet.
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> They cry out, there is no one to save,
> to Yahweh, but there is no reply;
> I crush them fine as the dust of the squares,
> trample them like the mud of the streets.

Indeed, this genocide against the Philistines is not limited to the activities of David. In Amos, for example, amongst the various punishments listed under the heading 'Judgement on the Neighbours of Israel and on Israel Itself' (Amos 1:2) only the Philistines suffer the approbation of total annihilation. While Tyre, Phoenicia, Damascus and Judah are prophetically to suffer various punishments from burnt palaces to exile, Yahweh is not going to rest until 'the last of the Philistines is dead' (Amos 1:8), confirming the narrative drive throughout the Old Testament towards the ultimate elimination of the Philistine race. This destruction is further visited in Jeremiah when 'the word of Yahweh that was addressed to Jeremiah against the Philistines' (Jer. 47:1) announces their fate in dramatically constructed imagery:

> Men shout aloud, and there is wailing
> from all the inhabitants of the country,
> at the thunder of his stallions' hoofs,
> the crash of his chariots, the grinding of his wheels.
> Fathers forget about their children,
> their hands fall limp
> because the day has come
> on which all the Philistines are to be destroyed (Jer. 47:2-4).

The Presentation of Delilah

Within the Old Testament, there appears to be no tactic that the Philistines will not employ in their inherently futile struggle with the people of Israel, from open combat to licentious subterfuge. The latter tactic finds its most eloquent expression in the story of Samson and Delilah in which the Philistines appear to hatch an elaborate plan to foil the armies of Israel but inevitably the end up as the dupes of the all-knowing Yahweh. This strange interaction between Samson and the Philistines is predicated upon the direct insistence of Yahweh, who sends an angel (Judges 13:8-25) to forecast the conditions of Samson's conception and birth and the child is stated as clearly being possessed of 'the spirit of Yahweh' (Judges 14:25). His birth is announced as a direct result of Yahweh 'who was seeking an occasion for quarrelling with the Philistines; since at this time the Philistines has Israel in their power'

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(Judges 14:4). This marks a significant shift in the interventionist policies of Yahweh who appears to create Samson for the very purposes of disposing of the Philistines rather than merely responding to another attack. Samson, therefore, is a Trojan horse whose infidelities are directly manufactured by a pro-active Yahweh who appears very well briefed in the possible Philistine responses to Samson's activities (a not unreasonable expectation given his divine status!).

The main tactic employed by Samson to antagonise the Philistines is to arrange a marriage with a Philistine woman, who notably does not even merit a name[24], and to behave in such an outrageous fashion as to force the Philistines into a response that will ultimately prove to be their undoing. What is particularly interesting about this episode is that Samson's provocative behaviour and the Philistine's inevitable response reverses the usual Old Testament duel between the Israelites and the Philistines in that the latter are seen to respond to a provocation rather than acting as initiators. Their response parallels the typical Israelite reaction to some perceived Philistine threat yet it is the latter who ultimately suffer the greatest losses. It would appear, therefore, that the Philistines are never to be granted an opportunity to speak back while even their self-defensive actions are placed clearly in the context of their intrinsic ruthlessness. Conversely, Samson's overtly murderous behaviour, which springs from a persistent and immutable Israelite self-belief, is depicted as morally superior to his Philistine counterparts, each act of Samsonite rage and slaughter being firmly contextualised and justified with the divine world view of the people of Israel. Delilah, who became Samson's paramour after the murder of his first wife by the Philistines, is the traditionally feminine mirror image of Goliath, utilising her beauty and charm to persuade Samson to reveal the source of his prodigious strength. In a typical binary opposition, Samson's great physical power is exemplified as a great virtue, while that of Goliath appears grotesque, even carnivalesque. The inherent inconsistency of this portrayal of physical strength merely reinforces the perception of the narrative bind that constricts the emergence of a balanced perspective. What is seen as an admirable attribute in Israelite hands is clearly seen as an unnatural malformation in the hands of those destined to be the less than an objective cultural correlative. Samson's prodigious strength is employed solely for the destruction of the Philistines and one of the many ironies of the Book of Judges is that while Samson's disobedience to Yahweh results in his death, it is the Philistines who appear to suffer the greatest losses. When he tells Delilah of the source of his strength,

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[24] Throughout Judges 14, Samson's wife is referred to as 'one of the daughters of the Philistines' (Judges 14:1) or 'this one' (Judges 14:4) or by other various badges of anonymity.

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Samson reneges on the deal made between his mother and the angel of Yahweh, while his role as 'he who will begin to rescue Israel from the power of the Philistines' (Judges 13:5) is fatally undermined. Samson's humiliation at the hands of his foes (he is blinded) clearly indicates one of the strongest underlying themes of the Book of Judges, namely Yahweh's protection is dependant upon strict obeyance of the covenant and the only consequence of this form of disobedience is Philistine oppression. Significantly, although Yahweh appears to have deserted Samson and placed him under the control of the Philistines, at the last moment he allows Samson to destroy the temple of Dagon and simultaneously achieve the notable feat of killing more Philistines at his death then over the course of his life. Consequently, one of the primary messages of Judges is that Yahweh will punish the Israelites if they dare to betray the covenant, but this punishment will clearly amount to no more than a slap on the wrist and the opportunity to establish a range of new anti-Philistine mythologies which will sustain future punitive raids on their hapless neighbours. While the *NJBC* notes that 'God's presence insures the strength and God's absence opens the way for oppression'[25], the consistent logistical losers in the final analysis of Yahweh's turbulent relationship with the Israelites are the Philistines.

While Samson's swashbuckling twenty-year career as a judge in Israel comes to a dramatic and blood-soaked conclusion, no mention is made of the fate of Delilah, the Philistine woman whose guile led to his ultimate demise. As a female counterpart of Goliath, Delilah perfectly fits the Book of Judges poisoned view of the Philistines. Motivated by material greed (she is offered eleven hundred silver shekels by each of the chiefs of the Philistines), Delilah uses her sexual hold over Samson to tease out the secret of his God-given powers. Clearly, then, the Israelites have to be on their guard from every possible Philistine subterfuge and the crossing of cultural boundaries by Samson results in his eventual demise. In Judges 16:4, it is noted that 'Samson fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek', highlighting Samson's tender nature and the clear danger posed by Delilah's geographical heritage. His innocence, a consistent element in such a burlesque character, is manipulated by Delilah with strong sexual undertones in that she 'lulls' him to sleep on each occasion, utilising her physical attributes to the maximum, in much the same manner as Goliath attempted to use his natural physical superiority over David. While Delilah succeeds in tricking Samson, crucially it is Samson's own admission of the source of his strength that proves to be his undoing, rather than any direct action by Delilah. The

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[25] NJBC, p.160.

role of Delilah, therefore, entirely fits in with the regular biblical template of Philistine behaviour, guided by the overarching and immutable principal of the ultimately futile attempted destruction of the Israelite people.

Conclusion

In his complex analysis of the foundational principals of nationhood, Homi K. Bhabha argues that 'the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of its irredeemably plural modern space, bounded by different, even hostile nations, into a signifying space that is archaic and mythical'[26]. This crucial signifying space of the nation is predicated upon physical boundaries and the presence of ethnic groups whose major defining characteristics merely serve to justify the existence of that space and its inhabitants. Relative to the Philistines, the dominant thrust of certain books of the Old Testament is to portray them in such a negative light that their very presence acts as a justification of the nation of Israel. The myth of the Philistines and their intrinsic brutality is an essential composite element in the Davidian myth of the nation of Israel, and an unravelling of the one could certainly assist in the unravelling of the other.

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[26] Bhabha, p.300.