

Unearthing the Disturbing Ghosts of Postcolonial Lands That Linger After the Sermon

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Abstract: *What lingers over a wounded community after preaching? This paper argues that the disturbing ghosts of postcolonial lands linger in the pulpit and haunt the wounded hearers after the sermon. Preachers should not only acknowledge but also preach about these ghosts whose presence are found in the Bible and in Christ. Mirroring the features of the ghosts, such preaching, which I term haunto-postcolonial preaching, disrupts the conventional notions of linear time and segregated space and connects the ghosts to the hearers and the Bible. Its goal is to create a haunting space in the pulpit, unearthing unresolved postcolonial trauma to bring rupture to the existing oppressive structures in the church and society. By allowing the ghosts to haunt the congregation about a lost or a reality yet-to-be-attained, preachers invite their hearers to reimagine and pursue a better and just society beyond the sermon where the unappeased souls can be consoled.*

Introduction

What would it mean to bring hauntology into dialogue with postcolonial preaching? These two areas have many intersections, yet there seems to be a noticeable silence between them in the field of homiletics. In this paper, I delve deeply into this dialogue as I consider the disturbing ghosts that linger over a traumatized community after the sermon.¹ The term *ghost* in this discourse signifies the enduring presence of unresolved historical injustices and traumas that continue to impact present communities,² especially (but not limited to) those who have experienced colonialism and colonial-shaped migration.³ These ghosts symbolize the silenced voices, erased histories, and ongoing effects of colonial oppression that linger in postcolonial societies. I will first briefly explore the relation between land and postcolonial studies. Next, I argue that preachers should unearth the ghostly voices that are hidden beneath the postcolonial lands in order to disrupt the oppressive structures existing within both the church and society. Finally, I will use John 21:1-19 as an example of how preaching about these haunting voices from a postcolonial perspective can contribute to bringing forth justice and healing to a wounded community even after the sermon.

¹ The qualifier *disturbing* is employed to highlight the disruptive nature of the ghostly presences, which challenge the narratives of postcolonial progress and healing by insisting on recognition and redress. The ghostly capacity to disturb is applicable to most if not all communities, even to the least religious or spiritual ones. What these ghosts embody is not a supernatural force but traumatic memories that require reckoning and such traumatic memories are by nature disturbing. At the same time, the disturbing nature of these ghostly presences does not rule out the comforting effect it can bring to those who feel seen and heard when their suppressed or overlooked trauma has been brought to light.

² The term *ghost* encompasses the concepts of *spectre* and *phantom* and is used interchangeably to underscore the multifaceted nature of haunting. *Spectres* often signifies something that is both present and absent, acting as a haunting reminder of unresolved past conflicts or injustices. Also, *phantoms* emphasize the unseen or unnoticed influence of past traumas on current generations. For an in-depth exploration of these concepts, see Colin Davis, "Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms," in *French Studies* 59, no. 3 (2005): 373-79, and Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2006).

³ Mayblin and Turner argue that "the history of migration globally is very much entangled with colonialism." Lucy Mayblin and Joe B. Turner, *Migration Studies and Colonialism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2021), chap. Introduction, sec. "Migration Studies and Colonialism."

Postcolonial Lands and Disturbing Ghosts

The relationship of land to postcolonial studies is complex and multifaceted when viewed through the lens of collective trauma and hauntology discourse, particularly within indigenous communities and immigrant populations.⁴ Land plays a significant role in the colonial experience, as European powers often sought to assert control over indigenous lands through colonization and territorial acquisition. We can find in some nineteenth-century paintings the effort of European settlers seeking to portray the land in Australia as empty, cleared, fertile, enticing for emigration, and ready for European colonization.⁵ Similar associations can also be observed in the coastal landscape paintings of Canada's renowned *Group of Seven* during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶ Their depictions of wilderness and coastal landscapes often portrayed the land as a primitive space awaiting discovery and conquest by colonizers, while disregarding and marginalizing the presence of indigenous communities who had long inhabited those lands.⁷

Such colonial perception of lands was often bolstered by traditional creation theologies prevalent at that time. Scholars such as S. Lily Mendoza and George Zachariah point out that these theologies, with their emphasis on "a sovereign and transcendent God" creating the universe "out of nothing" (*ex nihilo*),⁸ provided a theological framework for interpreting the Genesis narrative that supported colonization. According to this interpretation, the primordial earth was perceived as void and empty,⁹ which legitimized the belief that the colonizers, as the chosen race, had a divine mandate to exercise dominion over the rest of creation through the colonization and subjugation of lands.¹⁰ While the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* is subject to debate, it remains an argument that colonizers employed in the creation narrative as a justification for their acts of colonization.¹¹ As

⁴ In this paper, *immigrant* or *migration* specifically refers to individuals who have relocated, whether voluntarily or through forced migration, from one locale to another for various reasons such as political unrest, economic opportunity, family reunification, or academic pursuits. *Diasporic*, however, refers to a broader concept originally used to describe the dispersal of Jews after the Babylonian exile in 586 B.C. but now encompassing any large-scale, often involuntary dispersion of people to more than one location. Melvin Ember, Carol R. Ember, and Ian Skoggard, eds., *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures Around the World* (Boston, MA: Springer US, 2005), xiii, xxvi. While seeking to address the spectres of colonialism in a general sense, this paper acknowledges the intersecting reality of various diasporic groups within the colonial reality and does not dismiss the nuanced experience of each community, which carries their distinct historical traumas and ghosts. For more discussion on diaspora, immigration, and colonialism, see Ember and Skoggard, eds., *Encyclopedia of Diasporas*; Lucy Mayblin and Joe B. Turner, *Migration Studies and Colonialism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2021); Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Gil Loescher, Katy Long, and Nando Sigona, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵ Jeanette Hoorn, *Australian Pastoral: The Making of a White Landscape* (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Press, 2007), 43-44.

⁶ *The Group of Seven* was a group of Canadian landscape painters from 1920 to 1933. Isabelle Gapp, "Water in the Wilderness: The Group of Seven and the Coastal Identity of Lake Superior," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 55, no. 3 (2021): 590-620.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Susanah Lily L. Mendoza, and George Zachariah, eds., *Decolonizing Ecotheology: Indigenous and Subaltern Challenges* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2022), 3.

⁹ Mendoza and Zachariah, eds., *Decolonizing Ecotheology*, 3.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ One may question the necessity and validity of the concept of "*ex nihilo*" or creation out of nothing based on the presence of chaos and the existence of a primordial earth in the Genesis narrative. However, this is not something that this paper intends to explore. For further discussion on the topic of *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, see Pao-Shen Ho, "The Modal Problem of Creatio Ex Nihilo," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 88, no. 2 (2020): 197-213. See also Gary A. Anderson, and Markus Bockmuehl, eds., *Creation Ex Nihilo: Origins, Development, Contemporary*

Edward Said indicates, even though European colonizers recognized the inhabitation of the indigenous population on colonized land, they assumed that indigenous people lacked the right means to govern it.¹² This perception prompted the Europeans to view the colonized territories not only as barren but also in need of Christian salvation, civilization, and creation. Distorted religious narratives became the basis on which they asserted their dominance and sanctified their colonizing acts. The well-being of the indigenous populations and their rights to owning and living on their ancestral lands were disregarded and sacrificed under the name of expanding God's kingdom as missionaries acquired land for building churches.¹³ All such colonial acts performed in the name of Christianity inflicted collective trauma on indigenous groups.¹⁴

Collective trauma and the discourse related to haunting are interconnected with postcolonial studies of lands. The notion of the phantom,¹⁵ introduced by Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok through the lens of psychoanalysis, suggests that transgenerational spectrality has been deeply embedded within discourses surrounding "loss, mourning, and recovery" in trauma studies since the 1980s.¹⁶ In a sense, spectrality as the silenced voices of the past lies at the core of trauma studies. Cathy Caruth further proposes that to be traumatized is "to be possessed by an image or event" rooted in the past.¹⁷ In essence, ghost stories share similar qualities with collective trauma because they serve as persistent narratives that haunt the present through the echoes of past events.¹⁸ These haunting experiences, I argue, can be likened to the disturbing ghosts that perpetually linger on postcolonial lands. The term *hauntology*, coined by Jacques Derrida in his exploration of the enduring legacy of Marxism in *Spectres of Marx* (1993),¹⁹ is closely connected to postcolonialism. In Derrida's conceptualization, spectres emerge simultaneously from the past and the future, returning like ghosts to demand recognition and acknowledgement of traumatized experiences so that a resolution can be made.²⁰ In a sense, hauntology, shaped by a non-linear understanding of time and a transgressional understanding of space, is about something that

Challenges (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017).

¹² Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 9.

¹³ Sifiso Mpfu, "A Theology of Land and Its Covenant Responsibility," in Jione Havea, ed., *People and Land: Decolonizing Theologies* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020), 77.

¹⁴ *Collective trauma* or *community trauma* refers to "an aggregate of trauma experienced by community members or an event that impacts a few people but has structural and social traumatic consequences." The concept of cultural trauma, closely related to collective trauma, concerns "a collective feeling they [a cultural group] have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness..." While I use the term *collective trauma* to highlight the communal nature of trauma in the lens of postcolonialism, I place equal emphasis on the necessity of cultural understanding of the community to address its trauma collectively. Pinderhughes, H., Davis, R., & Williams, M., *Adverse Community Experiences and Resilience: A Framework for Addressing and Preventing Community Trauma* (Oakland, CA: Prevention Institute, 2015), 11, 22. See also Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004); C.H. Thesnaar, "Embodying Collective Memory: Towards Responsible Engagement with the 'Other'," *Scriptura* 112, no. 1 (2013): 1–15.

¹⁵ Abraham and Torok use "the phantom" as the idiom to refer to the notion of ghost. Their works include Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *L'Écore et le noyau* (Paris, Flammarion, 1987; first published 1978) and *Cryptonymie: le verbier de l'homme aux loups* (Paris, Flammarion, 1976), quoted by Colin Davis, "Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms," 374.

¹⁶ Martin Jay, *Cultural Semantics: Keywords of Our Time* (London: The Athlone Press, 1998), 163–4, quoted by Esther Peeren, and María del Pilar Blanco, ed., *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2013), 11.

¹⁷ Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5.

¹⁸ Martin Jay, *Cultural Semantics: Keywords of Our Time* (London: The Athlone Press, 1998), 163–4, quoted by Blanco, *The Spectralities Reader*, 11.

¹⁹ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

repeatedly resurfaces from the past as a reminder of a lost or yet-to-be-attained alternative reality. It prompts us to lament while pushing us to pursue a better and more just future. Hauntology addresses unresolved tensions, trauma, and histories of oppression such as the violent history of colonialism, which become disturbing ghosts that haunt the related individuals and/or communities in the present. In Elaine Enns and Ched Myers's *Healing Haunted Histories*, the authors delve into their own indigenous traumatic histories on the North American continent.²¹ Through their part-memoir narratives, they navigate the ongoing haunting of transgenerational trauma experienced by indigenous communities on postcolonial lands.²² Enns and Myers argue that the lingering effects of postcolonial haunting not only impact indigenous communities but also other groups of people, particularly white people and Christians who have a responsibility to engage in the work of restorative justice.²³ The haunting of collective trauma is ever-present, repetitively returning in various forms to haunt wounded communities such as indigenous groups.

Residing on postcolonial lands, many people – especially those from colonized spaces – continue to be haunted by memories and histories tied to colonialism. Their experiences unfold in a non-linear narrative, shaped by a cyclical and spacious understanding of time and space. On postcolonial lands, where pulpits are established and where colonial violence was carried out, these disturbing ghosts linger and represent voices that have experienced collective trauma inflicted through dispossession, cultural suppression, and other forms of oppression in the process of colonization. Although closely tied to the lands from which they originate, these disturbing ghosts are not confined to their associated land or a specific location. Rather, they transcend and transgress spatial boundaries. Abraham and Torok argue that the presence of the “undisclosed traumas of previous generations” embodied by ancestral phantoms continue to haunt subsequent generations, whether the individuals are aware of it or not.²⁴ To Derrida, a spectre is “neither soul nor body, and both one and the other,”²⁵ who transgresses geographical and even ontological spaces between life (being) and death (nonbeing). Even after a people migrate to another social space, the haunting will not stop, as the spectre who has inhabited a people will travel with them. Therefore, regardless of our spatial location, we cannot escape being haunted by spectres who have the ability to inhabit both places and people.²⁶ While spectres may appear more frequently or loom larger in certain spaces – for example, the spectre of colonialism is more visible in former colonies – they are never limited by any spatial boundaries.

This is especially true considering the contemporary waves of migration. The twenty-first century, also referred to as “the age of migration,”²⁷ has been characterized by its diversity resulting from cross-border movements that have reshaped various aspects of human landscapes such as geography, economic structures, religion, and culture on a global scale.²⁸ According to the *World Development Report 2023*, there are approximately 184 million migrants worldwide,

²¹ Elaine Enns and Ched Myers, *Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021).

²² “We believe that past and continuing Indigenous dispossession is the “primal sin” of settler colonialism, haunting us and demanding a reckoning (Italics in original).” Enns and Myers, *Healing Haunted Histories*, xxvi.

²³ Ibid., 10-13, 18.

²⁴ Colin Davis, “Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms,” *French Studies* 59, no. 3 (2005): 374-376.

²⁵ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 6.

²⁶ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi, 12.

²⁷ See Stephen Castles and Mark Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

²⁸ Gemma Tulud Cruz, “When No Land on Earth Is “Promised Land,” in Jione Havea, ed., *People and Land: Decolonizing Theologies* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020), 35.

making up approximately 2.3% of the world's population.²⁹ Among these migrants, around 37 million individuals are classified as refugees who have sought asylum due to political persecution, wars, and various forms of violence in their countries of origin.³⁰ Contemporary migration has a "double-edged character," encompassing both challenges and opportunities.³¹ Migrants not only bring new prospects to their designation but also carry the weight of a shared colonial history as "victims of empire."³² In the "postcolonial context of migration," the legacy of colonialism continues to perpetuate displacement, causing and shaping migration in the present day and inflicting trauma, economic hardship, loss, and suffering on many individuals.³³ In essence, communal trauma acts as a connective thread, linking the experiences of indigeneity and migration through their shared history of ongoing displacement and the loss of ancestral lands.³⁴ These unsettling spectres persist on postcolonial lands, disturbing and lingering over the pulpits even after sermons are preached.

Considering these dynamics between postcolonial lands and the haunting discourse from the perspective of collective trauma, especially within indigenous communities and immigrant populations, this paper proposes broadening homiletical horizons by establishing a connection between hauntology and homiletics. I argue that this approach, which I term as haunto-postcolonial preaching, entails not only acknowledging the lingering presence of spectres after sermons but also preaching about the ghostly voices found within the Bible and in Christ, with the goal of fostering justice and healing within traumatized communities in a postcolonial pulpit.

Unearthing the Disturbing Ghosts for Justice

At the heart of hauntology lies the pursuit of justice, as ghosts are closely connected to the unresolved injustices embedded within a culture's history. While the desire for a just society is an uncontestable social disposition, the particular manifestation of this demand for justice through the lens of ghosts in hauntology can be a subject of controversy in many cultures. This controversy primarily stems from the pervasive taboo surrounding the notion of ghosts across diverse cultural contexts. Taboos, in general, function as cultural mechanisms to uphold ethical prohibitions, preserve societal order, shape cultural identities as well as foster communal solidarity within a cultural group.³⁵ The discourse surrounding ghosts falls into the category of forbidden taboos in various cultures, as it is deemed unspeakable due to the potential dangers it poses to the "liminal individuals."³⁶ Speaking openly about ghosts, therefore, challenges these established taboos and is regarded as risky behavior that can evoke avoidance, resistance, and fear at both individual and community levels.

Although introducing hauntology into preaching can pose a great challenge in cultures where ghosts are considered taboo, it is important to acknowledge that ghostly taboos are often related to the cultures' history of injustice. Many believe that the presence of lingering ghosts

²⁹ The World Bank, *World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2023), 1.

³⁰ The World Bank, *World Development Report 2023*, xxvi, 1.

³¹ Gemma Tulud Cruz, "When No Land on Earth Is 'Promised Land,'" in Jione Havea, ed., *People and Land: Decolonizing Theologies* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020), 36.

³² Cruz, "When No Land on Earth Is 'Promised Land,'" 35.

³³ HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial Preaching: Creating a Ripple Effect*. Postcolonial and Decolonial Studies in Religion and Theology (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021), 1.

³⁴ Kate Rose, ed., *Displaced: Literature of Indigeneity, Migration, and Trauma* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 1.

³⁵ Max D. Price, *Evolution of a Taboo: Pigs and People in the Ancient Near East* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 92-3.

³⁶ Price, *Evolution of a Taboo*, 93.

among the living arises from strong negative sentiments caused by mistreatment, wrongful acts, betrayal, or murder of the deceased when they were alive. These vengeful ghosts would choose or haunt a living person to help them uncover the reasons behind their death and seek justice after death. Failure to respond to these requests often leads to misfortune or even death. 竇娥冤 (*The Injustice of Dou E*) is a classic Chinese folklore tale illustrating themes of injustice and revenge.³⁷ It tells the story of Dou E, a young woman falsely accused of theft and executed unjustly by a corrupt local officer. Not only was Dou E wrongfully accused, but her family was also persecuted and driven out of their home. Because of her tragic fate, Dou E's spirit had turned into a haunting ghost targeting the corrupted officer and his family until justice was served in the end. Each culture has its own unique ghost stories and haunting experiences, so it is crucial for haunto-postcolonial preachers to delve deeper into their cultural context and history. It is important to note that “the meta-concept [of ghost] that comes to possess virtually everything” is different from the specific concept of a ghost that is rooted in its historical and cultural particularities.³⁸ Therefore, preaching from a hauntological perspective reminds preachers to uphold the tension between the transhistorical (suffering as a universal experience) and specificity (contextual traumatic stories) in traumatic experiences.

Justice is at the core of both hauntology and Christian theology, which is deeply rooted in the reconciling and redemptive work of Jesus Christ in an unjust world. As the spectres unveil absurdity and unjust rule throughout human history, they stubbornly insist to be heard and demand justice from both humans and God. Preaching about the justice of God, therefore, can be an opportunity for us to meet the disturbing ghosts face-to-face. However, preaching does not end with haunting; rather, its goal is to create a ghostly space or a postcolonial “in-between space” in the pulpit where a horror moment in the marginal space may ultimately lead to healing and transformation.³⁹ The presence of such spectres prods us into taking up the ethical responsibility of others which, to preachers, means to employ the ghostly language rooted in postcolonial spaces to unearth disturbing ghosts in preaching. This approach enables preachers to retell people's suffering and help them “find new meaning in their lives.”⁴⁰ Certainly, even when preachers decide to encounter a spectre of a lived experience from the pulpit, the spectre may or may not choose to show up and the agency belongs to this radical other. While we cannot control when or what the spectre speaks, it is the responsibility of preachers to first be willing to wrestle with the stories of God in the ghostly space and thereby create potential moments for stories of spectres to be heard.

To further illustrate the application of a haunto-postcolonial perspective in preaching, I will employ this interpretative lens to an examination of John 21:1-17 and demonstrate how preaching about these haunting voices from a postcolonial perspective can contribute to bringing forth justice and healing to a wounded community.

³⁷ Hanqing Guan 關漢卿, *Dou E Yuan 竇娥冤 [The Injustice of Dou E]* (Changchun: Jilin wen shi chu ban she 長春: 吉林文史出版社), 2016.

³⁸ Blanco, *The Spectralities Reader*, 14.

³⁹ This postcolonial “in-between space” or the “Third Space” within hybridity, according to Kwok, is a “multiple, fluid, porous” space, where hidden or marginalized voices could be heard and remembered and where transformation could take place. In this hybrid Third Space, postcolonial preachers are to question the clear boundaries of material, time, identity, and language, and assert the presence of God in between these boundaries. Yohan Go, David Schnasa Jacobsen, and Duse Lee, “Making New Spaces In Between: A Post-Reflective Essay Weaving Postcolonial Threads into North American Homiletics,” *Homiletic* 40, no. 1 (2015), 56. See also Kwok Pui-lan. “Postcolonial Preaching in Intercultural Contexts,” *Homiletic* 40, no. 1 (2015): 8–21

⁴⁰ Jim Rendon, *Upside: The New Science of Post-traumatic Growth* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 2015), 323, quoted by Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 30.

*John 21:1-19: Unearthing the Haunting Story*⁴¹

In the story of John 21, Jesus revealed himself to the disciples for the third time after his death (v. 14). While the first two encounters of the resurrected Jesus took place in Jerusalem (John 20:19-23 and 20:24-29), the third took place at the Sea of Galilee where “a mysterious twilight [took place] in which one cannot distinguish what appears as real and what as symbolic.”⁴² In the dim light from a distance, the disciples initially failed to recognize the resurrected Jesus Christ on the shore. It is only after Jesus commanded them to cast their nets and the miraculous catch of fish occurred, a scene that resembles the miraculous fishing event described in Luke 5, that the disciples recognized him. Jesus then invited the disciples to partake in a meal that he had prepared for them, which was situated next to a fire of burning coals (John 21: 9, 12-13). After the shared meal, Jesus turned to Peter and posed the question, “Do you love me?” three times (vv.15-17a), alluding to Peter’s earlier threefold denial (John 18). Later, Jesus prophesied Peter’s future martyrdom and asked Peter to follow him (vv.17b-19).

In this narrative, Jesus appeared as an apparition, crossing the boundaries of time (past, present, future), space (Jerusalem and Galilee), life and death (crucifixion and resurrection). Although the presence of this ghostly Jesus, the crucified and resurrected Messiah, initially brought a sense of strangeness and peculiar feeling upon the disciples, Jesus soon invoked the memories of their time being together over the past three years.⁴³ Through his presence, speech, and actions of breaking bread and sharing fish, this ghost-like Jesus blurs the line between past and present, challenging the very dichotomy between life and death. By re-enlivening the past in the present through his resurrected and wounded body, Jesus created a ghostly experience which not only allowed the disciples to get a taste of the eschatological tension in the present (“already but not yet”) but also empowered them to enter a future filled with predicted suffering.

There are *many* ghostly images that subtly reveal a haunting presence within this text. One such image is the fire of burning coals. This “*fire of burning coals*” or “*a fire of coals*” (ἄνθρακιά) is mentioned only twice in the New Testament: first in the courtyard of the high priest, where Peter denied Jesus three times (John 18:18), and second, here at the shore where the resurrected Jesus asked Peter the threefold questions. The image of *a fire of coals* (ἄνθρακιά), therefore, acts as a ghostly image that connects these two scenes, reminding Peter of his experience of denying his beloved teacher under the threat of death. It evoked the feelings of guilt and shame within him. These feelings, brought forth by the ghostly image, provide the backdrop for Jesus’s conversation with Peter in verses 15-17 where another ghostly element emerged in the form of a recurring question.⁴⁴ When Jesus asked Peter the same question (“*Do you love me?*”) three times, Peter was grieved (v.17). His grief arises “not because Jesus has changed verbs, but because the same question is being asked for the *third time* (emphasis added).”⁴⁵ Just as he had disowned Jesus three times, his love for his Lord was now questioned three times. The threefold question asked by Jesus clearly paralleled the threefold denial of Peter. The haunting threefold questions, together with the

⁴¹ The exploration of John 21, especially the image of the fire of burning coals, is inspired by a sermon delivered by Wing Yin Li in Hong Kong, 2019. Li is currently a Ph.D. student in theology at Princeton Theological Seminary.

⁴² Beasley-Murray, George Raymond, *John*, World Biblical Commentary, Vol. 36, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 416.

⁴³ Haenchen, Ernst, Robert W Funk, and Ulrich Busse, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 7-21*, Hermeneia (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1988), 225. See also D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 673-674.

⁴⁴ Haenchen, et al, *John 2*, 223-224.

⁴⁵ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 678.

imagery of the fire, were like disturbing ghosts that unexpectedly reappeared from the past to haunt Peter. These ghostly voices brought Peter back to the painful night when he had betrayed Jesus.

According to John 18, it was a freezing night in the courtyard of the high priest, where the servants and officers had lit a fire to warm themselves. That night, Jesus was arrested and handed to the chamber of the high priest. The arrest exposed the political alliance between the members of the Sanhedrin and the Roman government (vv.18-24), which further “underlines the pervasiveness of the imperial power even in juridical matters.”⁴⁶ When the maid and the servants of the high priest confronted Peter about his relation to the “gang of Jesus” (vv. 16-17, 25-26), Peter, out of fear, lied and denied any connection to this arrested man. As a Jew, Peter was not unfamiliar with the experience of surrendering and yielding to the oppressive powers. It was a survival tactic that had been ingrained in his people for hundreds of years. Surrounded by the officials and their servants, whose presence simply reminded him of overwhelming imperial power, Peter tried to blend in and hide his true identity. While Peter’s fear of the political power of the Roman empire remained hidden in the scene, the spectre of colonialism continued to haunt him *whenever* and *wherever* he was, both consciously and unconsciously, even after he left the courtyard and met the resurrected Jesus by the sea.

That was why Jesus had come to encounter Peter and ask him the recurring question right by the fire. There, using the fire and the question, Jesus acted as a powerful preacher who employed both *show* (the ghostly appearance next to the fire of burning coals) and *tell* (the threefold question) in his conversation with Peter. Jesus created a ghostly space that invited Peter to return to the courtyard – the colonized territory – to acknowledge and unearth the disturbing ghost that had been haunting him. Jesus the preacher did not simply cast out the ghost. Instead, he allowed the haunting to emerge in a visible and audible manner, prompting a process of post-traumatic growth in Peter. This ghostly encounter initiated by Jesus reembraced Peter with love and healed the hidden wound inside him. It also directed Peter’s attention toward a future where God’s glory would be magnified, empowering him to confront the disturbing ghosts on both a personal and communal level on a colonized land.

In Peter’s story, we witness the powerful influence of a ghostly sermon that seeks to unearth the disturbing ghosts within the listeners. After Jesus’s show and tell in John 21, we can see in the book of Acts that Peter carried this ghostly encounter and shared it with his community as one of the leaders of the early church. This act of sharing allowed transformation to extend beyond the immediate moment after the words were spoken, resonating with others and potentially inspiring them to confront their own haunting experiences. Yes, the ghosts linger after the sermon, but so does the transformative power of the Word. While Peter revealed to other disciples the spectre of colonialism that had been haunting the community, he also urged the community to continuously remember and retell these collective haunting stories through the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ. By continuing the dialogue and communal reflection sparked by a ghostly sermon, the impact can deepen and ripple around and through the community, opening up a new way of being for a community in their search for healing and justice. This new way of being, that is living together with the ghostly God in and outside the worship space, is founded on a profound relationship rooted in the love of God, through which both Peter and all the followers of Jesus could find healing and redemption in the presence of the ghostly Christ.

Conclusion

⁴⁶ Jerome H Neyrey, “‘Despising the Shame of the Cross’: Honor and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative,” *Semeia* 68 (1996): 119-120.

Through exploring the convergence of hauntology and postcolonialism from a homiletical perspective, this paper has addressed the silence that exists between these two fields in preaching. The relationship between land and postcolonial studies was briefly examined, revealing the crucial role that preachers have in responding to the collective socio-political trauma resulting from colonial fallout in the faith community. By unearthing the ghostly voices hidden beneath the surface of postcolonial lands, preachers are inviting themselves and hearers to challenge the oppressive structures that persist within both the church and society. The act of acknowledging and preaching about disturbing ghosts is necessary for healing and for true freedom to be conceived. Upon such recognition, preachers' biblical hermeneutics and preaching are further broadened and enriched by this haunto-postcolonial perspective. There are more ghosts emerging from different social locations, urging us to listen to their stories and preach about and for them. These disturbing ghosts will continue to demand a hearing until the suppressed voices become audible in postcolonial pulpits.

Using John 21:1-19 as an illustration, this paper has demonstrated how the haunto-postcolonial perspective can be applied to biblical interpretation and preaching. By juxtaposing the hauntings in the Bible with cultural hauntings and with the crucified and resurrected Jesus who lies at the center of these narratives, we are empowered with a sense of strength and hope to imagine a possible future in the ghostly image of Christ that is free of oppression. Ultimately, by preaching about these haunting voices from a haunto-postcolonial perspective, preachers actively contribute to the pursuit of justice and healing within wounded communities. As Paul Tillich astutely suggested, God is found by those who courageously dive into the depths in search of hope, even in the face of the looming threat of nonbeing.⁴⁷ Preaching from a haunto-postcolonial lens allows us to look deeper and beyond the pulpit, discarding false hope promised on the surface. As we delve deeper to unearth the ghostly voices that permeate postcolonial lands, through our turning to the spectres and the spectralization of this turn in preaching, we shall receive the strength of a hope that is lying in the depths where we can find the unshakable Ground.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York, NY: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1948), 59.

⁴⁸ Ibid.