


## Article

# Hybridized Surviving: The Diaspora Narratives of Joseph, Esther, and Daniel

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**Abstract:** There are a number of challenges faced by diasporic people, yet they all seem to be connected to one major issue: “identity”. Their narratives are built on questions surrounding who they are, when they are no longer living in/on their home/land. As they migrate to foreign lands, their notions of identity become clouded, and quite often they struggle to “belong”. Second-generation people could be heard asking: “Where do we belong?” “The lands our parents came from?” “Or the lands we now live?” “Is it both? Or is it neither?” “Do we even know who we are? How do we fit in? How do we survive?” The aim of this essay is to highlight the issue of diasporic identity in the narratives of three biblical migrants: Joseph, Esther, and Daniel. The purposes of these biblical accounts seem to reflect the ambivalence of diasporic existence, where they can achieve success but also experience adversity. Yet these narratives also deal with how identity is problematized in diasporic contexts. I will be engaging these narratives in conversation with my own story, in a bid to view alternative understandings and constructs of diasporic existence, particularly for second-generation migrants within religious communities. Furthermore, the hope is that a re-reading of these narratives may generate alternative theological considerations in light of the struggles of second-generation migrants.

**Keywords:** diaspora; Hebrew Bible; talanoa; Pasifika theology; colonialism



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## 1. Introduction

This essay will review the biblical narrative, particularly in the Hebrew Bible, as a response to the issue of identity in the Australian-Samoan diaspora, focusing on second-generation migrants within religious communities in a bid to uncover alternative understandings and constructs of diasporic existence. In this context, most first, second, and succeeding generations of diasporic Samoans in Australia are part of Christian communities. For them, the Christian Bible acts as a source of counsel and inspiration for their faith and daily living. While I will be using the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible as a point of reference in this essay, it is not due to a privileging of this biblical text, but to engage with these diasporic communities. To begin, I will provide a brief discussion of the term “diaspora” before analyzing three diasporic identities in the Biblical text, namely, Joseph, Esther, and Daniel. While these three characters are not the only diasporic or migrant identities in the Hebrew Bible, they do provide clear examples of hybridized living and surviving in the diaspora that is key for this essay. Accordingly, their experiences as depicted in the narratives will provide key reflection points for the challenges and possibilities of hybrid identities in diaspora.

To extrapolate the diasporic tendencies in these narratives further, I will situate my own narrative in conversation with these three biblical characters. In doing so, I must acknowledge the importance of the argument that since modernity, there has been an awareness of nationality as unhooked from religious belonging and cultural ethnicity (Taylor 2007, p. 516). However, for a country such as Samoa, its national identity is not unhooked from its religious identity, as identified through the nation’s motto: “E faavae i le Atua Samoa” (“Samoa is founded on God”). The phrasing of the motto is intriguing as it

does not favor a particular denomination, but instead articulates a multi-faith context. Yet despite the diversity of religious allegiances, there is only one major Samoan translation of the Bible that is used by all Christian denominations, known as the “Lomiga Fou” or the Revised Edition of the Holy Bible in Samoan. In this sense, many denominations are united through the biblical text, and through the bible, there is a common national identity being realized, even for Samoans living abroad. The hope is that in one respect, such stories may enlighten and inform our understanding of our own struggles with our identities as second-generation migrants living in Australia. At the same time, such a reading may generate further hermeneutical implications for reading migration and diaspora in the biblical narrative. Significantly for this issue, this essay will analyze the narratives from which these characters are being told, to locate alternative theological and ethical implications for us to consider.

## 2. Diaspora: An Overview

The term “diaspora” comes from the Greek word *διασπορά*, which derives from “*διασπείρω*”, meaning “to scatter” (Louw and Nida 1988, p. 199). Louw and Nida define *διασπορά* as “the region or area in which persons have been scattered (particularly a reference to the nation of Israel which had been scattered throughout the ancient world.)” (Louw and Nida 1988, p. 199). The word was first used in the Septuagint, in Deut 28:25, when referring to the exiled Israelite community. Subsequently, the term “diaspora” was applied to Jewish exilic communities that resulted from the Assyrian invasion of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) in 722 BCE and the Babylonian invasion of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) in 586 BCE.

The depiction of the Jewish diasporic communities is an intriguing discourse in the Old Testament. Gruen argues that “[t]wo potent and recurrent images, with quite distinct messages, dominate the discourse on this subject” (Gruen 2002, p. 4). Gruen highlights these two distinct images through Psalms and Jeremiah.

The first image is evident in Psalm 137, for instance, which alludes to the Babylonian exile as a forced diaspora described by “melancholy reverie” that “signals the lament of the exile crushed by enforced removal, incapable or unwilling to make peace with an alien environment, and pining away for Palestine as the authentic soul of his being” (Gruen 2002, pp. 4–5).

On the other hand, Jeremiah portrays the exile as a voluntary settlement. In Jeremiah 29: 5, 7, for example, the prophet says: “Build houses, settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce . . . Work for the good of the city to which I have exiled you, since on its welfare yours depends” (Gruen 2002, p. 4). Here, the emphasis is on agency as opposed to the sorrow of Psalm 137, thus underlining a different character of the exile. Here in Jeremiah, “[t]he prophet counsels adjustment and accommodation, a recipe for successful diaspora existence—an identification of Jewish interests with those of the community at large” (Gruen 2002, p. 5).

This latter category of diaspora is articulated by Fernando Segovia to also include people who have migrated willingly to other countries in mass numbers, due to the pull of economic benefits and well-being (Segovia 1995, p. 60). Indeed, low-income earners desire to be economically stable, and would seek this from an alternative place, leading to a pattern of migration from third world to first world (Segovia 1995, p. 60). Samoa falls into this category, as Samoans migrate to “first-world” countries such as the United States, New Zealand, and Australia.

## 3. Samoan Migration to Australia

The first mass exodus of Samoans migrating south occurred in New Zealand in the 1960s. The next country to receive mass migration of Samoans was Australia. Felise Va’a comments that “[s]tudies on Samoan migration in Australia are few, no doubt because Samoans did not migrate there on a large scale until the 1980s” (Va’a 2001, p. 39). The studies that have been conducted since the 1980s had been focused on certain cities where

there was a concentration of Samoans in residence. Burns et al. (1988) conducted a study on Samoans living in Newcastle in New South Wales, while Connell and McCall (1989), with a much broader focus on Pacific Island migrants, including Samoans, focused on Blacktown, west of Sydney. Va'a focuses on the Canterbury-Bankstown area in Sydney.

For this essay, it would be arduous to account for all these Samoan settlements, so I will focus more on the motivations and the attitudes of Samoan migration to Australia. Va'a notes that Samoans had migrated to Australia between the early 1900s and prior to the 1970s, but on individual pursuits, and back when immigration laws were not as tight as they have become since. There was never a mass migration in those early years due to an initial suspicion towards the cash economy because "[d]uring colonial times, from 1900 onwards . . . Samoan interest was limited to obtaining cash for their basic needs" (Va'a 2005, p. 5).

However, as mentioned earlier, New Zealand would not be the final destination for a large number of Samoan migrants. With a larger economy and better job prospects available, New Zealand's closest neighbor Australia would ultimately be targeted by Samoan migrants. Subsequently, this led to the mass movement of Samoans to Australia, beginning in the late 1970s to the early 1980s. Va'a, who writes of the early years of mass Samoan migration to Australia in his book *Saili Matagi: Samoan Migrants in Australia*, underlines the pull of economic welfare for both Samoan immigrants and their extended families back home, as being the impetus behind their migration (Va'a 2001, p. 46).

Similar to New Zealand, there was a tendency by Samoans to seek housing closer to areas where there were "unskilled" jobs available, such as coal mining, fruit-picking, abattoir work, and factory jobs, and/or areas with cheap housing (Va'a 2001, p. 39). Over the years, other parts of NSW were settled, and during the 1980s, Samoans headed to other areas on the eastern side of Australia where there were more jobs, and cheaper and newer housing as Sydney grew in population. The 1990s saw Samoan migrants move to the western side of Australia, to cities such as Perth and Fremantle, to work in the mines. The demographics of Samoan settlement were no longer restricted to New South Wales, but now extended to the rest of Australia.<sup>1</sup>

With the settlement of Samoans, churches also became established, which consequently gave evidence of Samoan presence. Significantly, the churches gave the Samoan communities a form of identity that replicated the villages in Samoa. Macpherson and Macpherson contend that the identity of the village is synonymous with the church "as though the church has always been the foundation of the village, its history and its social organisation" (Macpherson and Macpherson 2013, p. 62). Considerably, Samoans in Australia not only set up churches to maintain their religious experience, but to establish continuity with village life in Samoa. Va'a claims that the churches provided many of the socio-economic and political functions of the Samoan village. For instance, they provide new arrivals with support in finding suitable accommodation and employment, financial assistance, and a platform where they can interact and network with other Samoans (Va'a 2001, p. 244). Indeed, the churches turned out to be the Samoan migrant's village away from Samoa.

### *Issue of Identity*

There are a number of opportunities and challenges faced with Samoans living in diasporas, yet they all seem to be connected to one major issue: "identity". Identity is often defined in terms of the person's relationship to their social, communal, or cultural context, but also according to person's own ongoing personal development. Erik Erikson, a psychologist known for his work on identity theory, understood personal identity in similar terms, writing that personal identity is "the perception of the selfsameness and continuity of one's existence in time and space and the perception of the fact that others recognize one's sameness and continuity" (Erikson 1968, p. 50). Intriguingly, Erikson, in contrast to personal identity, introduces what he terms "ego identity". He explains:

Ego identity then, in its subjective aspect, is the awareness of the fact that there is a selfsameness and continuity to the ego's synthesizing methods, the style of one's

individuality, and that this style coincides with the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for significant others in the immediate community. (Erickson 1968, p. 50)

This sense of identity foregrounds the struggle for Samoan and Pasifika diasporic persons, who try and establish “sameness and continuity” in a place that culturally is completely different from the homeland. In this sense, Stuart Hall's definition of cultural identity is key for many Samoan and Pasifika people who migrate to foreign lands for the purpose of settling for work and education. Hall states that cultural identity

is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being.’ It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (Hall 1996, p. 225)

This cultural transformation of one's identity in migration and how the narrative speaks to the question of identity will be the focus of this study. Paul Ricouer contends that to understand identity, one must distinguish between *idem* “identity as sameness”, where the identity of a person remains the same and never changes, and *ipse* “identity as self”, which speaks to the sameness of identity across time and throughout change (Ricouer 1991, p. 73). Significantly, as Ricouer suggests, the narrative becomes a telling of a story that must happen first before telling (Ricouer 1984, p. 74). Imagining a diaspora narrative from a Samoan perspective, the questions surrounding who they are, when they are no longer living in their homeland, articulate the struggle of “becoming” for many Samoans. As they migrate to foreign lands, their identities become clouded as they struggle to “belong”. Where do they belong? Samoa? Australia? Both? Neither? Do they even know who they are? How do they fit in? How do they survive? These are some of the difficult questions that emerge as they migrate. Not only does it become a physical move, but also a psychological and cultural shift. In terms of Ricouer's thesis, these questions may frame our understanding of identity according to the biblical narrative. Conversely, these questions might also point us to how one negotiates identity in their context—in this case, a diasporic context.

I have chosen three diasporic identities from the Hebrew Bible to highlight their struggles but also their abilities to thrive in diasporic conditions. There are so many characters in the Hebrew Bible narratives that I could speak of, but due to the lack of space, I will discuss the following three. As mentioned earlier, these three characters portray hybridity in diaspora, as well as the struggles and opportunities pertaining to hybrid people in migration. In the order of the Old Testament Canon, I will first discuss Joseph (Genesis 37, pp. 39–50), an Egyptian Hebrew. Secondly, I will examine Esther, a Persian Jew, and lastly, I will bring in Daniel to the conversation, a Babylonian-Persian Jew. No single identity is superior to the other. The point of this discussion is to look at the narratives and how they portray the diasporic tendencies of such characters. Furthermore, the hybridity of these three characters is what connects them. According to Homi Bhabha, “hybridity” is “the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal” (Bhabha 1985, p. 154). The disavowal that Bhabha refers to is where hybridity is claimed, as the hybrid identity ceases from the mimicry by those who succumb to colonial identity. Hybridity then allows for the person to control their identity space, by adopting elements of the host land's culture, while maintaining significant parts of their own ethnic culture. Such an experience is fraught with difficulty but can also present unique opportunities for success. For this reading, then, I will discuss how each character adapts to their new settings, but also how each character may struggle to position themselves. The discussion will analyze evidence in the biblical narrative of where the character utilizes parts of their ethnic heritage to deal with the conflicts of living on diasporic lands. While this may present similarities among the three characters, it pays also to review differences among them, which coincides with

the ambivalence of the diasporic experience. The hope is that we can then draw ethical and theological implications from the narratives from a diasporic and migrant perspective.

#### 4. Joseph

We begin with the story of Joseph as found in the book of Genesis, chapters 37 and 39–50. The story of Joseph is a well-known story, often read as a tale about a dysfunctional family, with issues of jealousy and betrayal. I invite us to take a look at the narrative from a diasporic perspective. Reading this narrative from a diasporic perspective is not new. Hyun Chul Paul Kim reads the Joseph story as a diaspora narrative, claiming that:

Joseph has a hybrid identity, which embodies a heroic character of survival and hope for the diasporic audiences. Joseph is an outsider in Egypt (from the perspective of the Egyptians) and an insider (from the perspective of his brothers when they visit). At the same time, he is an outsider with his brothers (initially) and an insider (eventually and/or ideally). This hybrid identity means that Joseph fully belongs to neither Egyptian nor Israelite communities. Yet, through walking a path between resistance and assimilation (and this is what the story aims to inspire), Joseph can contribute an astonishing “good” to both communities. (Kim 2013, p. 220)

Joseph’s heritage is thus Israelite, as he is the son of Jacob, one of the biblical patriarchs of Israel. Although Joseph is an Israelite by descent, it is intriguing that he is referred to as a “Hebrew” (Gen. 38:14; 41:12). The term “Hebrew” in the Pentateuch is associated with the “sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt” and “[i]n this regard, the name Hebrew is used many times by foreigners, as derogatory”, especially by the Egyptians as used in Gen 41:12 for Joseph (Vengeyi 2013, p. 104). Thus, the narrative makes it clear that Joseph is a slave and denigrated for his ethnicity.

Joseph’s migration, therefore, was not of his will. In diasporic terms, we can establish that Joseph’s sojourn was of the “forced migration” type. The narrative points out the problems within Joseph’s family, particularly with his brothers. Through the sale by his brothers to the Midianite traders (Gen 37:28), Joseph is taken to Egypt as a slave. He is the first of the Hebrew nation to migrate to Egypt before the Hebrew population grows (Exod1:7). Later, Jacob and the rest of the family migrate to Egypt when there is famine in the land of Canaan. This is a typical diasporic setting, as Jacob and the Hebrew family establish themselves in Egypt due to famine and the possibility of a better life away from their homeland.

##### 4.1. Joseph Living in Egypt

Joseph begins his new life as Potiphar’s servant (slave) and ends up in prison. However, due to his God-given ability to explain dreams and visions, Joseph rises through the ranks in the Egyptian court and becomes second in command to Pharaoh. It is a remarkable achievement for a Hebrew slave. The evidence in the text of Joseph’s identity shift reveals the path he chose to succeed in a foreign country. Throughout his tenure as second in charge, one can argue that Joseph had learnt the ways of the Egyptians when he was a servant to Potiphar (Gen 39), particularly if he was going to serve in the household of such an Egyptian aristocrat. Serving in the house of an Egyptian lord meant, for instance, that Joseph had to learn and observe the traditions and aristocracy of Egyptian culture.

By learning the ways of the Egyptians, Joseph had to dress like them. With his brothers failing to recognize him (Gen 42:8), it is evident that he was adorned in Egyptian dress and fashion (Gen 41:14) (Kim 2013, p. 229). According to Victor H. Matthews, although not explicit, clothing is a significant motif in the Joseph narrative. He argues that “[g]arments are central to Joseph’s position within his family and to his role as a high official in Egypt” (Matthews 1995, pp. 29–30). In line with the clothing motif, the transition of clothing for Joseph not only marks his status change, but also his identity shifts. Indeed, when one lives, dresses, and dines like Egyptian royalty, it is fair to assume that one would act and speak like them also. This was the case with Joseph, as he also spoke down to foreigners



(Gen 42:7), which was typical speech of the powerful and arrogant Egyptians, as depicted in the Genesis and Exodus narratives. Indeed, he was essentially an Egyptian.

#### 4.2. Evidence of Joseph's Hebrew-Ness

Diasporic people often have to negotiate their identity in their new contexts, and if possible, may desire to maintain elements of their native and ethnic cultures. There is evidence in the narrative that despite the heavy influence of Egyptian culture upon Joseph, he still maintained his Hebrew identity.

Firstly, Joseph acknowledges the God of his forefathers, and not any god of Egypt when explaining the meaning of dreams (Gen 41:17). He also declares his faith in God before his brothers, despite his brothers' failure to acknowledge who he was at the time (Gen 42:18). It is interesting to note in Joseph's acknowledgment of the Hebrew God that when interpreting dreams, he does not consult the "scientific" literature which Egyptian experts may have consulted, but instead consults God! (Gen 41:17)

Secondly, Pharaoh gives Joseph the Egyptian name "Zaphenath-paneah" (Gen 41:45), which is not used—the Hebrew name Joseph is preferred.<sup>2</sup> Ironically, Pharaoh himself uses the Hebrew name Joseph as opposed to the Egyptian name he came up with. "Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do" (Gen 41:55). The significance of names as a mark of Hebrew identity is perpetuated through the names of Joseph's sons who are also given Hebrew names: Manasseh, which means "God has made me forget", and Ephraim, meaning "God has made me fruitful" (Gen 41:51–52) (Kim 2013, p. 229).

Finally, Joseph's final wish before his death is that his bones be taken back with the Israelites when they return to the Promised Land (Gen 50:25). This resonates with the sense of longing for the homeland typical of diasporic peoples (Kim 2013, p. 229; Gilroy 2000, p. 124).

Indeed, the narrative does portray Joseph in a positive light, having persevered through adversity. Through a diasporic lens, we can also see the ability of a diasporic character to adapt to foreign conditions through a hybridized approach, recognizing the significance of cultural heritage in a foreign land. However, one may question the measure of Joseph's success because ultimately, the succeeding generations are made slaves to Egypt (Exod 1:8–14). Is it even "hybridized surviving" if later generations are made to suffer?

### 5. Esther

In the previous narrative, despite the success of Joseph, the later generations of Israelites became slaves to Egypt. Let us consider a diasporic narrative with an alternative course. The second diasporic identity is Esther, the protagonist of the book bearing her name. The story is set many centuries after the Joseph story during the reign of the Persian Empire in the 6th century BCE. At this time, Judah (the Southern Kingdom) was under Persian rule. In Esther 2, we are introduced to Mordecai, a Jewish court official in the Persian court. Mordecai raised his young Jewish cousin Esther after her parents died while she was young. Like Joseph, Esther rises from her status as a slave in the new context to be the new queen to the Persian King Ahasueras after the defiant former queen Vashti was deposed (Esther 2:17). The story of Esther not only tells the tale of diasporic Jews, but the book itself could also be labeled a "diaspora book". Aaron Koller argues this position, stating that "Esther is a diaspora book, advocating positions that may have seemed natural (if controversial) to Jews living in the Diaspora, but which would have been anathema to nationalist Jews in the land of Israel" (Koller 2014, p. 175).

#### 5.1. Esther Living in Persia

Esther, despite her Jewish heritage, had to adopt a Persian identity when she became queen. In contrast to Joseph, the book's protagonist takes on the Persian name "Esther", in place of her Jewish name "Haddasah" (Esther 2:7).

While it is necessary that she dresses in Persian attire in the Persian court, she started dressing like the Persians before her appointment to conceal her Jewish identity for the

sake of survival (Esther 2:10; 20). She even adorned in Persian cosmetics (Esther 2:12). In addition to her Persian royal apparel, Esther was also well-versed in Persian law (Esther 4:10) and Persian court etiquette (Esther 5:1).

### 5.2. Esther's Jewishness

In such a position of power, the risk of revealing her Jewish identity meant that if her heritage were revealed, it would not only mean her potential removal from royal rule, but could also result in her potential death, something that the story's antagonist Haman was well aware of. As a Jew, Esther is essentially of slave status, and it would have been a disaster if her Jewish identity was revealed. Yet despite the threat, Esther could no longer stand for injustice against her people, and ultimately resigned to revealing her cultural heritage to King Ahasueras.

In Esther's plan, she recognizes the significance of fasting, an important Jewish religious observance, as a way of interceding on her behalf while she pursues justice (Esther 4:15–16). Bush contends that "[t]he fast Esther requests is clearly intercessory, for she defines its objective as 'עָלַי', 'on my behalf.' ... this is an exceptionally severe fast" (Bush 1996, pp. 397–98).

Consequently, Esther reveals her Jewish identity when she confronts the King with Haman's evil plan (Esther 8:1). The risk pays off for Esther when she fights for the freedom of her people despite the unchangeable nature of Persian and Medes law, as she is granted the right to fight against her enemies with the support of allies. Esther's heroics mark the origin of the Jewish festival of Purim, which is still celebrated today to commemorate the salvation of Judah against King Ahasueras' decree. The popularity of Purim is posited by some scholars as a possible reason behind the inclusion of Esther in the Hebrew Bible canon (Crawford 2003, p. 69; Koller 2014, p. 156).

It is clear in the narrative, that the portrayal of Esther serves to promote perseverance and character in the diaspora. Sidnie White Crawford's conclusion then is apt: "Esther serves as a model of the successful Jew living in diaspora, and she is able to function as a model precisely because she is a woman" (Crawford 1999, p. 872). In contrast to Joseph, the Esther narrative presents a character who through her perseverance led to the well-being of later generations, who were able to fight and defend themselves. The events in the diaspora narrative also held significance for Jewish readers, both ancient and modern, who celebrate these events during the Purim festival.

Indeed, the story of Esther paints a hybridized figure who shows a deep concern for later generations. In contrast, Joseph's main concern is for his immediate family, with little concern for later generations. Interestingly, both stories are fraught with risk and danger, and Esther and Joseph adopt cautious approaches when dealing with colonial powers. Signs of resistance and disavowal are not as explicit, so what happens when the signs are profound? To answer this, let us review a different narrative.

## 6. Daniel

The third diasporic identity is Daniel. He is often seen as a prophet, especially in the Christian tradition, yet in the Hebrew Bible, Daniel is viewed as an intelligent post-exilic Jew who succeeded in the Babylonian court and was therefore a role model for Jewish captives in Babylon. Like Esther, Daniel is seen as a role model for Jewish living in the diaspora. Daniel Smith-Christopher points out that "[r]ecent attention to the stories in chaps. 1–6 has also emphasized their literary character as stories that recommend a 'lifestyle for the Diaspora'" (Smith-Christopher 1996, p. 20). In light of the last two narratives, let us also consider the theme of resistance in such a lifestyle.

### 6.1. Daniel Living in Babylon

Daniel was a young man when taken into the Babylonian court with the trio, Shadrach (Hananiah), Meshach (Mishael), and Abednego (Azariah). They were considered the most intelligent and the most handsome in all the empire. The Babylonian Empire was infamous

for its centralized form of government, where all of its subjects became exiled to Babylon, and they all had to learn one language (Akkadian) and one culture. Daniel not only lived under the Babylonian reign, but he also lived under the Persian reign, which overtook Babylon after the death of Nebuchadnezzar.

Under the centralized form of government the Babylonian kingdom enforced, Daniel became engrossed in the Babylonian culture. Firstly, Daniel was given a Babylonian name, “Belteshazzar” (Dan 1:7). Alongside the other Jewish youths in the Babylonian court, Daniel was well-versed in Babylonian law and culture (Dan 1:17). Ultimately, Daniel became successful in the diaspora when he became the highest official in the Babylonian kingdom and the top-ranked sage (Dan 2:48).

## 6.2. Daniel's Jewishness

In the same vein as Joseph and Esther, Daniel also maintained his Jewish identity in the diaspora. Firstly, despite being given the name “Belteshazzar”, Daniel never really adopts his Babylonian name like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego do. Instead, right throughout the book, he uses his Jewish name “Daniel”.

Secondly, when the Jewish youths were being trained in the king's court, Daniel rejects the king's food for fear of being defiled (Dan 1:8). Daniel considered the king's food as unclean and requested instead a diet of vegetables and water (Dan 1:12). There is some debate as to the nature of Daniel's request, because “strictly speaking, the royal food and drink are not prohibited by the pentateuchal laws” (Collins and Collins 1993, p. 142). Yet, with the possibility that the king's meal may have contained meat that was prohibited under biblical law, “the vegetarian diet requested can be understood as an attempt to safeguard the observance of the Levitical laws” (Collins and Collins 1993, p. 142). Such a request was also perilous, as it would have offended the king and led to potential death, yet Daniel stood by his religious beliefs. Intriguingly, the narrative is silent on the response of the youths to the issue. Smith-Christopher posits the question: “Why not the others? Does this imply a division among the Jews on these issues of resistance?” (Smith-Christopher 1996, p. 40).

Thirdly, Daniel maintains his faith in the God of his ancestors, and declares his God as being the great wise One before King Nebuchadnezzar. It is the God of the Jewish people who will reveal the meaning of his dream, and not the gods of the Babylonians (Dan 2:28). Daniel's faith in his God continues under the reign of the Persian king Darius. Yet, oblivious to the consequences of his friendship with Daniel, Darius orders that every person in the kingdom must bow down to him. Daniel defies the order and instead faces the city of Jerusalem to pray to his God. In doing so, he is spotted, and ordered to be thrown into the den of lions (Dan 6:10–11). Interestingly, the level of defiance Daniel shows depends on one's reading of the narrative, or perhaps where one chooses to read. In particular, Smith-Christopher raises an interesting question regarding the windows from where Daniel prays: “But is he found out or has Daniel openly violated the law?” (Smith-Christopher 1996, p. 91). He goes on to explain:

The Aramaic reads in the passive—that is, the windows ‘were opened,’ implying that they always were that way. The Theodotian text of the Septuagint reflects the Aramaic passive construction, using a passive participle form. The passive form suggests that, although Daniel was defying the law, he was not intending to defy it in any way that was innovative or different from his routine. However, the Old Greek text reads in the active voice, with Daniel actually throwing open his windows before he prays. The Vulgate also reflects this reading, which is rendered in the Douay as: ‘Now when Daniel knew . . . that the law was made, he went into his house and, opening the windows in his upper chamber toward Jerusalem, he knelt down three times a day.’ The Ethiopic texts (4th century?) echo this construction, rather than the Theodotion/MT passive voice. Clearly, the active voice tends to emphasize Daniel's prayers as an act of open or public defiance more than does the passive, although the theme of defiance is not thereby



totally absent even in the Theodotion/MT reading. (Smith-Christopher 1996, pp. 91–92)

Whichever way one reads, the discrepancy between the various texts offers an alternative and nuanced look at Daniel's defiance of Darius' law. More importantly, it seems that in these various texts, there is an open defiance shown by Daniel that is unequivocal when compared to Esther and Joseph. Daniel's form of hybridity highlights an ability to show resistance to the colonial power, even in the face of death, and ultimately, he succeeds. Yet like Esther, Daniel's hybridity does provide hope for later generations of diasporic Jews, representing the recommended lifestyle for Jews in diaspora.

## 7. Synopsis

When looking at the three diasporic identities from the Old Testament, there are a number of differences and also some similarities. The most telling similarity among all three of them was their success in the diaspora. All three came from humble and difficult beginnings, to rise to prominence as people of power and prestige. They all adopted qualities of the host land, while still maintaining their ethnicity and their heritage as Hebrews/Jews. Yet surviving as a hybridized person, according to Bhabha, entails the strategic reversal of the process of colonial domination, which is observed at different levels among the three narratives. To understand this, there are two dimensions to consider.

First is the colonizer. Colonialism according to the *Oxford Dictionary* is defined as “the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.” I would add that the exploitation by the colonizers involves the land and its people and assimilating natives/indigenous peoples to their cultures.

In each of the three identities, there was a colonizer, and all were guilty of exploitation. The Egyptians colonized the Hebrew people and exploited them physically by forcing them to become slaves. The Babylonians exploited the Jews by taking away the elite and removing them from their homeland and destroying their temples. By implication, the Persians could also be seen as a colonial figure to the Jews if one considers the subtle exploitation of Jewish religious sentiments by ordering them to rebuild their temples in order to impose a temple tax (Schaper 1995, pp. 537–39).

What is crucial in these texts is the disavowal by those colonized, which is the second dimension. This raises points for the question raised above, because these experiences of these three identities resonate with the concept of “hybridity”. The “third space” is different among the three. For Esther and Joseph, the process of reversal is subtle in the third space, while for Daniel, the disavowal is far more explicit. The consequences for later generations were more of a concern for Esther and Daniel, whereas Joseph only had consideration for his immediate family. These narratives might have inspired its readers to adopt “hybridized” forms of survival. Indeed, they all dared to be “different”. Not for the sake of being different, but by embracing their roots and deciding on how to better survive in the diasporic context. The biblical authors of these texts decided that the best way to survive in diasporic conditions was to adopt a hybridized approach to living by embracing the “best of both worlds”: taking the best of what Egyptian, Babylonian, and Persian culture had to offer and intertwining it with their native Jewish/Hebrew cultures. From a narrative point of view, Ricouer provides perspective when considering the hybridity in these stories, whether they replicate “life stories” of diasporic people who are “rendered more intelligible when they are applied to narrative models—plots—borrowed from history and fiction (drama or novels)?” (Ricouer 1991, p. 73). Indeed they do, because at the same time, these “life stories” can be viewed as spaces which the biblical authors have created, to point us to an alternative space, a “third space”, for thinking theologically. Such theological thinking resonates with a transnational world where people are in motion and shifting from one land to another. I wish to draw implications from these stories for an alternative narrative theology.

## 8. Implications for Narrative Theology: A Diasporic Talanoa

From a theological standpoint, the ambivalence of diaspora may illumine the complexities of theology in the contemporary world. Doing theology has primarily been carried out within the confines of the colonial design, while largely ignoring the rich diversity of voices outside of that colonial enterprise. To clarify, Pasifika peoples are mostly part of Christian communities, and for countries such as Samoa, the percentage of Christian membership is more than 90%. The theological discourse of Pasifika countries is grounded mainly through the European Christian traditions of the London Missionary Society in the 1800s and others such as the Methodist and Catholic missions during the same era. However, since the 1960s, which coincided with the independence of many Pasifika nations, there has been a steady rise in new theologies that are grounded in indigenous knowledge and reference, which seek to contextualize and relativize theology for Christians of Pasifika heritage. For instance, the classic “Coconut theology” developed by renowned Tongan theologian Sione ‘Amanaki Havea implemented the surroundings of the native context, specifically the coconut tree and its various elements, as a way of thinking and talking theologically. For Havea, “If Jesus had grown up and lived in the Pacific, He could have added another identification of himself—I am the Coconut of Life” (Havea 1987, p. 14). Furthermore, Havea rightfully argues that “Pacific Theology should not be either a duplication of or transfer from Western thinking, but should be one grown and nurtured in the local soil” (Havea 1991, p. 9).

For Pasifika people in diasporic contexts, they move beyond the “local soil” into foreign lands. This space, which I argue aligns with Homi Bhabha’s argument of hybridity in the “third space”, is a place where “even the same signs can be appropriated, rehistoricized and read anew” (Bhabha 1994, p. 37). Diaspora represents this space where hybridity is claimed, and for Pasifika people in the diaspora, they represent hybrid identities. In my case, I am both Samoan and Australian: an Australian-Samoan. In the spirit of Havea, a theology for diasporic peoples which acknowledges the lands on which they have been nurtured is necessary, because for most Samoans in the diaspora, they are connected to the *fanua* (land) through their Samoan cultural heritage while also connected to the host land where they are being educated and employed. This hybrid existence, therefore, provides an alternative framework for doing theology where one can push back at the colonial project, and utilize other perspectives in a new discourse. As a diasporic person of Pasifika heritage, I propose that such a discourse be framed by *talanoa*.

The diversity of Pasifika voices brings about various nuances of *talanoa*. I take Jione Havea’s definition of *talanoa*, which captures most of the nuances of Pasifika, as he writes that *talanoa* is:

The confluence of three things: story, telling and conversation. Talanoa is not story without telling and conversation, telling without story and conversation, or conversation without telling and story. Talanoa is all three—story, telling, conversation—as one. (Havea 2014, p. 210)

*Talanoa* problematizes the usual way of doing theology, for there is no set destination in *talanoa*. The word *talanoa* from a Samoan understanding is made up of two words: *tala* and *noa*. *Tala* means “to open up” or “story”, implying that when one tells a story, one “opens up” about their experience. *Noa* means “nothing”, “nowhere”, or “nakedness”. This means that *talanoa* suggests an open conversation and storytelling that leads to “nowhere”. For Samoans and Pasifika people, this does not mean the conversation is about nothing, but that the focus is different. It is the journey (migration!) through conversation, storytelling, and hearing that is valued. Thus, theology through *talanoa* is a hybridized, diasporic, and migrant way of doing theology away from the constraints of Western systematized theologies. Theology through *talanoa* continues the growth of Pacific theology, to include Pasifika peoples in migration and in diaspora, because *talanoa* is also “non-linear, inclusive and fluid, encompassing holistic approaches to perceiving phenomena” (Cammock et al. 2021, p. 122).

I can imagine now a new narrative that could propose new theologies through *talanoa*. I can picture all three of these diasporic identities engaging in *talanoa*, perhaps around a *kava* bowl, sharing their successes and struggles. Yet as they are on diasporic lands, their *talanoa* would take a different form than if they were on their homelands. Their perspectives are refined by the new context, as they are able to review their cultural heritage in light of the new context, but they can also assess the new setting in *talanoa* with their own cultural values and ideas. Their rise from slave status to success would be common ground in their *talanoa*. However, their *talanoa* may take different tangents, as Joseph could speak to them of the trauma of not being loved by his own brothers, while Esther would share of the pain of losing her parents and being raised by her cousin. Daniel's experience in a pit was perhaps deadlier than Joseph's experience in his pit. And while Daniel and Joseph ended up living peaceful lives in their latter lives, Esther's life in diaspora was filled with uncertainty as she sought to fight off any nations wanting to end the Jewish race, as a result of the unbending Persian and Medes law. Although she is a queen, she is living much like a refugee.

The fluid and inclusive nature of *talanoa* means that *talanoa* always makes room for other participants, and the above *talanoa* is no different. Through *talanoa*, room is made for other diasporic and hybridized voices, and here I want to also engage in *talanoa* with Joseph, Esther, and Daniel. As a second-generation Australian-Samoan, I am a descendant of Samoans who migrated to New Zealand and Australia for a better future. I recognize that I was not forced to come to these lands due to a famine or hostility in the homeland. However, the effects of capitalism continue to colonize the world through migrating bodies. Hence, the shifts from third world to first world is a continued cycle as a result of the colonial project. Yet acknowledging colonial tendencies is the starting point for decolonization, and as the movements of third world to first world continue, Joseph, Esther, and Daniel remind me of my own hybridity and how utilizing the skills learnt in a new context may lead to my own success. However, I also remind Joseph, Esther, and Daniel that not every diasporic person shares their privileges. I tell them that their experience reminds me of the privileged diasporic Anglo-Australians who act as though they are indigenous to these lands. I remind them that there are other diasporic peoples, namely asylum seekers and refugees, who are being enslaved in detention centers with no foreseeable hope in sight. They have not been removed from their pits, still waiting for some traveling Midianites to remove them; still waiting for an angel to shut the mouths of encircling lions; still waiting for an edict to allow them to stand up and fight for their survival.

Such conversations offer different viewpoints for theology, grounded in decolonial thought. For diaspora people, colonialism is never-ending, and this may also resonate with the experience of indigenous peoples whose lands were never ceded and were stolen from them by invading people. For them also, colonialism is still on-going. Western theology only threatens to perpetuate the colonial discourse, and as such, these theologies need revising and reframing through *talanoa*.

## 9. Conclusions

The diaspora narratives discussed here provide significant implications for consideration. In the ever-changing transnational world, the narratives not only promote ideal ways of living for diasporic Jews, but also for readers in diasporic spaces. As a second-generation Australian-Samoan, the texts remind me of my hybridity. One may choose to be fully Samoan, or totally Australian, but either way, I would not survive in the diasporic context by constraining myself to one of those extremes. Allow me to explain. On the one end, by being totally Samoan, I neglect the laws and customs of this land, and resign myself to be a hostile member of society. On the other end, by being totally Australian, I neglect my heritage and become a mimic of a foreign culture. I end up losing sight of who I am while also losing touch with my familial links and culture heritage. At the same time, the narratives remind me of my own history of migration, particularly by the first generation—parents and grandparents. Their sacrifice and their risky decision to leave

their homes behind and migrate to a land they knew nothing about for the sake of a better future for second generation and beyond, should always be acknowledged.

The narrative therefore challenges the diasporic person to maximize the best of both worlds and embrace their hybridity. I contend that from a biblical perspective, this is the most effective way of surviving as second-generation. The narratives also nudge us to consider the legacies of colonization that threaten to become perpetuated throughout generations. The challenge is to dismantle the colonial project through remembrance: to remember one's origins and to never forget one's culture, one's language, and one's faith. To forget one's culture and language, and begin to mimic the dominant culture—that which is often white and Western—means that one is effectively being colonized again.

Finally, these diaspora narratives offer us ways of rethinking theology from a decolonial standpoint. The ambivalence of diaspora may produce uncertainty, but it also conjures new possibilities that the hybrid person often takes advantage of. To do theology the old way can be outdated, but more importantly, it can be damaging and tragic for others who live in colonized spaces.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In NSW, outside of Metropolitan Sydney, Samoans settled in country towns that provided opportunity for agricultural employment such as Griffith, Wagga Wagga, and Leeton. In Queensland, towns with cheap housing such as Logan City, Goodna, Deception Bay, and Cairns were settled by Samoans. In Victoria, Samoans settled areas such as Broadmeadows, Craigieburn, Melton, Tarneit, Cranbourne, Frankston, and Dandenong. In the Northern Territory, Alice Springs and Darwin now have Samoan communities. In Western Australia, Perth, and Swan Valley have Samoan communities, as Samoans headed west to take advantage of jobs in the mining industry.
- <sup>2</sup> Kim notes that there is a “tradition of having both a Hebrew name and a foreign name can be traced back to mid-eighteenth-century B.C.E. Egyptian texts and even later during the time of Judas Maccabeus”. In “Reading the Joseph Story”, p. 229. Also see, e.g., “Asiatics in Egyptian Household Service”, ANET, pp. 553–54.

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