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Grace L. Dillon

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Diaspora narrative in *Battlestar Galactica*

Grace L. Dillon

Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile,
and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare
you will find your welfare.
– Jeremiah 29:7

This article reads the original *Battlestar Galactica* series and its 1980 sequel as a diasporic narrative. It compares exodus and diaspora, contextualises the Colonial journey within emerging diaspora theory and views the *Galactica* allegory as an indicator of American imperialism.

Reliance on the theme of exodus is a common characteristic that receives little attention in the scholarship on the original *Battlestar Galactica* (US 1978–9), its spinoff *Galactica 1980* (US 1980) and the ‘reimagined’ *Battlestar Galactica* (US 2004–9). The proliferation of biblical allusions, along with the presence of original series creator Glen A. Larson’s theology, offers exodus as a ready-made description of characters’ movements throughout the narrative. However, ‘exodus’ has become the shorthand term of choice for artists and critics. Certainly the association heightens dramatic tension. Invoking it often and casually, however, has diminished its contribution to the *Battlestar Galactica* storyline while overshadowing the significance of diaspora as a unifying element of original and remade series. While it is convenient to think of major group movements as forms of exodus, reframing the Colonial trek in terms of diaspora acknowledges the story’s antecedents more fully and foregrounds the imperialist context that thematically unifies the various iterations of the story.

The 1978–9 original and its 1980 spinoff reflect conservative American Cold War consciousness in dialogue with the counterculture; it engaged contemporary American fears of the Soviet menace and the global spread of communism by offering nuclear dominance and ‘peace through strength’ as military solutions. Similarly, the 2004–9 series reflects problematised US-Canadian, post-9/11 identity in light of the threat of global ‘terrorism’ to democracy and the ‘American way of life’; it engaged fears that covert forces who might walk clandestinely among us had replaced the old-fashioned threat of all-out military conquest by an equally matched (or technologically superior) opponent. In essence, once the Soviet Union disbanded and America found itself the only

remaining global empire, new enemies to that empire necessarily emerged, while new ways of protecting the empire against its enemies were yet to be perfected. At heart, all *Galactica* narratives comment on the fears of an empire that risks falling, one whose culture is thus dominated by prognostications about the nation's risk of displacement and strategies for its restoration. Exodus and diaspora are linked historically and conceptually to this rise and fall of empire, making the *Galactica*'s journeys between 1978–80 and 2004–9 a barometer of changing attitudes toward American imperialism.

Exodus and diaspora

Casual descriptions of both Colonial and Cylon movement as exodus proliferate (e.g. Kukkonen 178; Melançon 211; 'Real War' 329; Sharp 27; Terjesen 122). Useful invocations of the exodus theme set the original and remade shows in a biblical context (e.g. McCutcheon 3). Exodus refers to the second book of the Torah, which encompasses the entire cycle of Hebrew exit from slavery in Egypt (chs 1–18) and subsequent peregrination to Sinai and establishment of Mosaic law (chs 19–40). These historical events, which scholars date to 1350–1200 BCE, introduce major themes to Judeo-Christian religious views: 'namely, God's action to deliver a people from bondage and to bind them to himself in covenant' (May and Metzger 67). Drawing parallels with the events in *Battlestar Galactica* proves limited when considering the whole story, because the similarities are surface at best. The 12 Colonial tribes embark on a historically meaningful journey from their respective planets on a quest for an uncertain destination. Comparison of the Adama character, analogous to a Mosaic leader in the context of Exodus, reveals that our original (Lorne Greene) believes *de facto* in the existence of Earth as home of a lost tribe, indicating that he has already 'found religion'. The people accept Adama's plan because they share an already-established covenant with their god, trusting Adama as an elder whose job requires him to know about things like lost tribes. The reimagined Adama (Edward James Olmos) lies and invokes what he regards as a myth to provide a sense of purpose (see Silverman 192). Reflecting postmodern sensibilities, the people are not as uniform in their beliefs here as they are in the original, but religious covenant is established. In both series, the voyage through star systems in the quest for Earth is an exodus in the sense of mass emigration. The Colonists already occupy a place where ideological covenant with a supreme being or beings is established and open to debate, so they do not need to search for one. Nor were they enslaved and in need of emancipation. They did not

want to leave their home worlds but could not stay. Their mass exit was forced by the violent encroachment of an opposing empire, conducted in the original by an interchangeable chain of faceless 'Imperious Leaders'. The original series' refrain clarifies the trajectory: 'Fleeing from the Cylon tyranny, the last Battlestar, *Galactica*, leads a ragtag, fugitive fleet, on a lonely quest. . .'

While the Israelites also embark on an exodus in this common sense of the word, they are moving toward Canaan, the land promised to their progenitor Abraham, and are not fleeing the Egyptians. Excepting the terse single-chapter account of how God decides to triumph over the Pharaoh while solidifying Israelite fear of and belief in him and his servant Moses (Exodus 14), the Israelite exodus ameliorates the state of the people. Aside from a bittersweet interest in the possibility of exploring their ancestral origins, the same cannot be said of the rag-tag Colonials. The closest analogy to Exodus in the original series occurs in 'Saga of a Star World' (17 Sep 1978), scene four, entitled 'Exodus', which includes Adama's injunction to the devastated survivors: 'Let the word go forth to every man woman and child who survived this holocaust. Tell them to set sail at once in every assorted vehicle that can carry them.' An omniscient voice-over, also spoken by Adama, supplies suitable, biblically intonated language:

And the word went forth to every outpost then in existence. And they came: the Aeries, the Gemons, the Virgos, the Scorpios, the Pisceans, and the Sagittarians. In all, 220 ships, representing every colony, colour, and creed in the star system. The human race might have one more chance, but first it would have to survive the alliance, the elements, and the unknown dark and sinister threats that would lie ahead.

The parallel passage should be found in Exodus, which includes a brief description and enumeration of the host: 'about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. And a mixed multitude . . . and very many cattle, both flocks and herds' (12:29, 50). Adama's account, however, contrasts its biblical referent, which emphasises Israel's upper hand: 'And the Lord had given the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they liked. Thus they despoiled the Egyptians' (12:36). Rather than facing an uncertain future of dark and sinister threats, Israel is assured of protection: 'For by strength of hand the Lord brought you out from this place' (13:3); 'for with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt' (13:9). Exodus represents the fulfilment of a divine plan and promise to bring the people to a land flowing with milk and honey; the people are enjoined to remember 'what the Lord did for me' (13:8) rather than what Pharaoh 'did to' them.

Relevant elements of Larson's 'exodus' scene include Adama's address to the survivors assembled later on board the *Galactica* as representatives of the 220 ships. 'We gather here', Adama confirms, 'to answer the single question: Where



'Saga of a Star World', *Battlestar Galactica*. Universal Studios.

will we go?' Adama provides a brief overview of ancient history before revealing the prize: 'a sister world far out, remembered to us only through ancient writings'. The destination is, of course, Earth, but Adama does not know where it is. He has a vague idea of which direction to take and of the possible enemies they will encounter in addition to the Cylons. The Israelites know their destination and adversaries precisely: 'the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, the Jebusites, which [the Lord] swore to your fathers to give to you' (Exodus 13:5).

The next engagement of the Exodus theme occurs in 'The Lost Planet of the Gods Part II' (1 Oct 1978). A shining star points the fleet toward Kobol, the 'mother world of all humans, where life began'. Adama, Adama's son and crack fighter pilot Apollo (Richard Hatch), and Apollo's future bride, the spunky former newscaster on Caprica, Serina (Jane Seymour), traverse ancient obelisks and a dusty tomb that recall Shelley's lesson in 'Ozymandias'. The pillars are covered in the ciphers of a lost language, which Adama has been studying from 'the old records'. Translating a random inscription, Adama provides additional exposition: 'That refers to the ninth lord of Kobol . . . He was the last ruler, before the 13 tribes migrated to the stars.' This reference to the original migration is evidence of a possible exodus, but details are lacking. We do not know whether the 13 tribes were delivered from bondage by a Mosaic leader, or whether the Lords of Kobol are analogues to the Egyptian pharaohs who enslaved the ancient Hebrews. Thus, human pedigree may descend from the Lords of a fallen empire or from the tribes that were enslaved by them; in either case, characterising the *Battlestar* colonists' search for Earth as exodus remains unsatisfactory.

Likening the Colonists' departure from their home planets to exodus appropriately recalls a biblical context, but one can discover a more relevant antecedent in diaspora. Diaspora has been used loosely and sparingly in describing



'Lost Planet of the Gods II', *Battlestar Galactica*.
Universal Studios.

the wanderings of the fleet, and seldom to provide the association with biblical narrative that McCutcheon recognises (3). As Braziel and Mannur point out, 'It is often used as a catch-all phrase to speak of and for all movements, however privileged, and for all dislocations, even symbolic ones' (3). Understanding the narrative arc implied by diaspora, as well as merging our analysis with the diaspora theory, is consistent with critical approaches that use *Battlestar Galactica* as a touchstone for reflection on the Cold War climate of the original series and on the uncertain post-9/11 transnational landscape of the reboot.¹

Biblical diaspora refers to either of two historical events: the Assyrian-Babylonian conquest of the nation-state of Judah, punctuated by the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem around 586 BCE, or the destruction of the remade temple by the Roman Empire in 70 CE. The more relevant antecedent for the present analysis is the first diaspora recorded in the Book of Ezekiel, which prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem (4:1–5:17) and the exile of the people from their homeland (12:1–20). Assumed to contain or rework first-hand accounts of the original biblical diaspora, Ezekiel provides a bridge between pre-exilic Israelite religion and post-exilic Judaism (May and Metzger 1000). Its nationalistic theme of the restoration of Jerusalem provides the foundation for formative uses of the term 'diaspora' and thus is relevant to the present discussion of the *Galactica* journey, which fundamentally represents a quest for restoration of human civilisation on a new home world, Earth.

1. On the Cold War allegory, see Muir (233–43) and 'Real War' (335). Although he does not include *Battlestar Galactica* in the analysis, Seed provides a useful overview of the Cold War context that informs it, particularly in 'The Star Wars Debate' (181–93). On resonances with the post-9/11 American experience, see Dinello (186), Johnson-Lewis (28), Marshall and Potter (6), McHenry (221), Mulligan (53), Leaver (133 et passim), Ott (13 et passim) and Pinedo (173).

This framework is also pertinent to series creator Glen A. Larson's use of Mormon history and theology. The derivation of *BSG* mythology from Mormon theology is well established (Astle 26; Berger 319; Collings 112; Cowan 227; Ford 83; Leventry 1; McCutcheon 3; Wolfe 303). The Mormon Church associates its origins with the first biblical diaspora, tracing its history to a sixth-century BCE prophet named Lehi who escaped the fall of Jerusalem during the time that Ezekiel prophesied the destruction of the temple. In this history, Lehi, his family and a small entourage populated North America.² In the *Battlestar* universe, the prophet Ezekiel himself was to make an appearance in the unproduced sequel to the *Galactica* 1980 finale. Entitled 'Wheel of Fire', the episode is set in the Chaldean desert in 592 BCE Babylon, where Ezekiel prophesied the fall of Jerusalem from exile before the destruction of the Temple. Ezekiel witnesses the fiery destruction of a Cylon Viper fighter ship, which he interprets as a 'chariot of God'.³ The rest is biblical history.

It is also worth noting that Mormon Church history refers to at least two diasporas of its own: the 'first Mormon diaspora' after Brigham Young and his followers established Salt Lake City, Utah as the Church's geographic and spiritual centre in 1847, and the 'second Mormon diaspora' in the decade after the Second World War (Driggs 75; Goodsell 361; Ostling and Ostling xxiv; Shipps 76; Smith and White 59).⁴ Born in Los Angeles, California in 1937, Larson can be identified with late-generation, first-diaspora Mormon communities (whether or not the association was meaningful to him). Mormon diaspora is relevant as yet another historical and religious antecedent for the *Galactica* narrative for a much more powerful reason than simply Larson's religious affiliation. Upon inspection, it becomes clear that the problem of pinning down precisely which term best describes the *Galactica* experience – exodus or diaspora – implies that the *Galactica* journey becomes (almost simultaneously) both at once. In turn, one can say that the chronicle of the origins of the Mormon Church by Joseph Smith in *The First Book of Lehi* also conflate exodus and diaspora. Lehi's

2. Maffly-Kipp discusses the accounts of the ancient 'New World' contained in the Book of Mormon, which combines the stories of the Jaredites, who travelled by boat to North America after the fall of the Tower of Babel, and Lehi's contingent, who were fleeing Babylonian persecution (xvi–xix).

3. Ezekiel and diaspora are wellheads for the ancient astronaut theory that also informs the *Battlestar* story. Berger includes Erich von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods* (1968) among Larson's source materials (319). Von Däniken traces evidence of extraterrestrial visitations to Ezekiel's merkabah vision, revising the theophany in which the prophet saw God's chariot throne with 'wheels within wheels' (Ezekiel 1:16) as a UFO sighting (see Lieb, especially 52–54.) 'The Wheel of Fire' script is accessible at http://media.battlestarwiki.org/wiki/File:The_Wheel_Of_Fire_script.pdf.

4. Mauss and Franks provide a comprehensive bibliography of social sciences sources on Mormonism, which lists works on Church history (76–77), geographic distribution (88–89), demographics (93–96), and migration patterns (96) too numerous to itemise here.

dispersal from Jerusalem, persecution by his own people and wandering in the wilderness are counterbalanced by his receipt of a divinely promised land in the so-called New World of North America. Put differently, the original diaspora that binds together the Hebrew prophet Ezekiel and the Mormon prophet Lehi remains a diaspora for Ezekiel, exiled close to the conquered homeland prophesying its restoration, while it becomes an exodus for Lehi, who leaves to subjugate North America as a promised land given to his progeny by God.

The original *Battlestar Galactica* follows the arc of classical or 'victim' diaspora (see Cohen 28), in which a nation is forcibly destroyed and its remnant expunged from its homeland, which in turn becomes the territory of the invading conqueror. *Battlestar Galactica* begins with the cataclysmic trauma of displacement, treats the required dispersal as exile rather than exodus and presents an exilic journey. *Galactica 1980* completes the diasporic arc by treating the arrival at Earth as assimilation with a host culture. However, the original mentality of the Colonials changes in the thirty years that they sojourn in space between the diaspora of exile and the exodus to a promised land, reflecting a very differing attitude toward their experience. Was it traumatic, unwanted and marginalising, as in classical diaspora? Or was it liberating, welcomed and empowering, as in exodus? The change in the short inter-season between completion of the original 1978–9 series and the 1980 sequel recasts the memory of traumatic dispersal as exodus rather than an exile, and moves the diaspora from the classical emphasis on victimisation into modern terms that confer diaspora onto colonisers. This change, like the evolution in diaspora theory itself, invites (post)colonial interrogation.⁵

A quick review of diaspora theory can help contextualise the complexities that arise from this conflation of diaspora and exodus. Cohen draws from the historical experience of the sixth-century BCE biblical narrative to begin identifying the classical features of diaspora. Diaspora is the dispersal from an original homeland, often by force, and often traumatic. Though displaced, the diasporic community retains a 'collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, and achievements', idealises the homeland and commits to maintaining, protecting, restoring or returning to it (Cohen

5. Similarly, (post)colonial biblical study reminds us that the Exodus story is not as simple as mainstream America likely believes. 'Postcolonial readings highlight, and criticize, the lack of emphasis placed on what happens after the Exodus – the conquest and extermination of the Canaanite population. The story of Joshua and his conquest of Canaan is one of the most traumatic for postcolonial interpreters. While liberation theology focused on the Exodus from Egypt as a salvific event for the poor and oppressed of Israel . . . postcolonial readers highlight the end result of the conquest of Canaan and the extermination of its people' (Crowell 224).

26). The diasporic community self-identifies as a distinct ethnic group with a common history and a shared future. Its existence within any host community remains problematic, sometimes because of the host's prejudice and fear. Despite these problems, however, the diasporic community acquiesces to its minority status and maintains hope that it will co-exist with the host through mutual tolerance, while imagining the longed-for restoration of or return to its original homeland.

Discussion in the social sciences has enlarged the classical definition of diaspora to include migrations that seek to trade, to gain employment or to advance colonial ambitions (Cohen 26). In order to accommodate this and other divergent views, Cohen subsumes the classical definition of diaspora, which arises from a 'scarring historical event', within the category 'victim diaspora' (28). Other forces, such as overpopulation, hunger, poverty and political dissension, can also result in trauma that produces diaspora, but victim diaspora is imposed by an imperialist agenda that results in being 'dragged off in manacles (as were the Jews to Babylon), being expelled, or being coerced to leave by force of arms' (28). Others disregard the classical requirement of traumatic dispersal – indeed, of the historical point of dispersal altogether – and associate diaspora with any 'migrant community that maintains material or sentimental linkages with its home country, while adapting to the environment and institutions of its host country' (Esman 14). In this view, colonisation itself can be considered a diasporic experience.

If immigrants leave their homeland to colonise an inhabited area and succeed in dispersing the indigenous population, are both the conquering colonisers and the scattered indigenous identifiable as diasporic communities? Consider the nineteenth-century American experience of Manifest Destiny. In the terms offered here, the white settlers who 'went west' as part of an imperial agenda to expand American territory illustrate how 'the conception of frontier' is usually linked to '*a people in exodus* populating the empty (or emptied) new territories' (Hardt and Negri 170; emphasis original). Manifest Destiny, a 'figural re-enactment of the Exodus story', was 'one of conquest and occupation rather than emancipation' (Spanos 127 et passim). In this case, exodus produced the diaspora of indigenous peoples. Historians and social scientists who regard any exit from a homeland within the definition of diaspora would consider nineteenth-century white settlements on the western 'frontier' as diasporic communities, and their interactions with American Indians as negotiations with the host. (Post)colonial studies and critical cultural theorists warn that this approach skirts hard ethical and legal questions by focusing on the mere description of migration rather than on analysis of cause and consequence.

In both views, diaspora involves four stages: dispersal, journey, arrival and assimilation. Classical or victim diaspora involves traumatic dispersal, exilic journey, unwelcomed arrival and minority assimilation. 'Modern' diaspora may or may not include trauma, exile, resistance and marginalisation by the host; additionally, a diasporic community that historically suffered classical diaspora may assimilate completely and no longer suffer negative effects of minority status. Proponents of the expanded treatment of diaspora nevertheless are interested in the disenfranchising effects of any exit from a homeland, even if the immigrants are colonial agents. (Post)colonial and cultural studies resist equating colonisation with classical diaspora because colonisation is precisely the kind of imperialist behaviour that brings about classical diaspora. Colonisation is an extension of empire, and diaspora is exclusion by empire; immigrant populations that extend empire share the privilege of power, while diasporic communities experience oppression. In this view, any diaspora theory that equalises the experience of the privileged and the experience of the oppressed mitigates the culpability of the oppressor and is itself 'an imperial gesture' (Brazziel and Mannur 3). One might easily level this charge against the creators of the original *Battlestar Galactica* and *Galactica 1980*.

Battlestar Galactica and *Galactica 1980*

The original series' 'Saga of a Star World' depicts the trauma that brings diaspora to the humans and establishes the context of empires in collision. 'Lost Planet of the Gods Parts I and II' extend the backstory of Earth and establish the key paradox that will pervade *Galactica 1980*. That is, their traumatised expulsion from their homes coupled with a sense of privilege or divine right to reclaim Earth as home reflects elements of both diaspora and exodus. 'War of the Gods Part I' (14 Jan 1979) and 'War of the Gods Part II' (21 Jan 1979) provide the coordinates to Earth, facilitating the Colonists' journey, and introduce the Beings of Light, which further assert the Colonials' divine rights and destiny to re-establish homeland. 'Greetings from Earth' (25 Feb 1979) brings the Colonials ever closer to the goal, introducing Terrans as evidence that the quest for other humans descended from Kobol is coming to fruition, and teasing out more clues as to the whereabouts of Earth. 'Greetings from Earth' and its companion 'Experiment in Terra' (18 Mar 1979) heighten the allegory of Cold War contention between the US and Soviet Union, further illustrating the binary arrangement of the strong and the weak, conqueror and conquered. Rieder's analysis of the emergence of sf in colonial discourse characterises the fear of

becoming a nation 'unable to inhabit the present fully, and whose continued existence on any terms other than those of the conquerors has been rendered an archaism and anomaly' (33). This is the fear of the Colonial fleet in diaspora. 'The Hand of God' (29 Apr 1979) ends the series with the tantalising capture of footage from the 1969 Apollo 11 moon landing, suggesting that the fleet is close to fulfilling the quest. But the season finale, which became the series finale, remains a cliffhanger, maintaining the diaspora rather than reaching the goal.

As a storyteller, Larson understood the appeal of maintaining the clear opposition of good versus evil in pitting the Colonial remnant against the tyranny of the Cylon Empire. The proposal for season two also maintains the fleet in diasporic limbo; of the suggested storylines, none deliver Earth to the Colonials.⁶ However, the narrative arc of the original vision ends *as* the beginning of *Galactica 1980*: in fact, the quick-clip previews that advertise the show immediately reveal Adama's plain declaration, 'We have at last found Earth'. *Galactica 1980* carries forward the diaspora arc by engaging the remnant in a series of negotiations with Earthling hosts for resources and acceptance. However, when the Colonials arrive at the presumed new home, they find to their dismay that Earthlings are a 'primitive' people, inferior technologically and politically. In 'Galactica Discovers Earth Part I' (27 Jan 1980), genetic genius Dr Zee (Robbie Rist/Patrick Stuart) clarifies that the Colonials hoped to discover an ally who could aid them in the Cylon war: 'Our tenacious pursuit of Earth has been founded on her ability to help us defeat our enemies. I now believe we have the visible proof that the Earth is not scientifically advanced enough to help us. Until Earthlings acquire advanced technology, and until the Colonials can trust them to use it in support of the Colonial agenda, Adama and Zee determine to mislead the Cylons away from Earth while simultaneously sending covert scouting parties 'who will work without revealing themselves to Earth's general population'. The penultimate episode, 'Space Croppers' (27 Apr 1980), unfolds the leadership's emerging policy of colonisation of Earth as the accepted way of promoting the safety of the *Galactica*.

In terms of classical or victim diaspora, something very different develops in Larson's portrayal of the *Galactica* remnant's relationship with their Earth hosts. The passage of a generation on board the *Galactica* lessens the memory of diaspora and exploits the exodus theme of wandering in the wilderness awaiting delivery of a promised land. This shift in emphasis is illustrated by the revised voiceover introduction, which lauds the *Galactica* herself as a beloved homeland: 'The great ship *Galactica*. Majestic and loving, strong and protecting.

6. Larson's proposal for season two is accessible at http://en.battlestarwiki.org/wiki/File:PDF_Icon.png.

Our home for these many years we've endured the wilderness of space.' Earth now becomes othered, a resource to exploit in the maintenance of the *Galactica*. Another diaspora of the indigenous Earthlings who find themselves in empire's way may be yet to come, but, alas, our sequel was cancelled before the story could play out.

Diaspora directs the course of events in all episodes of both the original *Battlestar Galactica* and *Galactica 1980*. As classic contact narratives, the subplots that take Colonial heroes off the *Galactica* and onto new worlds populated by strange creatures invite (post)colonial reading. Among the more familiar sf themes, stories of contact cast the indigenous as alien/other and depict conquest as discovery. The Colonials' technological superiority over both humans and non-human aliens whom they encounter aligns with a longstanding sf tradition that reflects 'colonial invasion as the dark counter-image of technological revolution' (Rieder 32). Additionally, these episodes follow the trajectory of the diaspora novella as discussed by Glissmann. This narrative 'appears historical, is miraculous but not impossible, has nearly always one main character, plot [that] moves towards one event, a solution to the conflict, which is of vital meaning for the people, and rise in status of the low status individual' (Glissmann 37). Glissmann emphasises the hero's status change: his actions protect or serve the dominant host culture and thereby elevate both his status and the status of his people, consistent with the biblical injunction, 'Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare' (Jeremiah 29:7).

Two episodes will serve to illustrate the intersection of contact narrative and diaspora novella structure. Both tales cast Colonials as diaspora heroes on host worlds who use their superior intelligence and technology to aid the host, thereby gaining stature while securing the welfare of their own community. In the original series, the hero's success enables the fleet to proceed on course toward Earth and leaves the host in a better condition than it held before the Colonial visit. In the 1980 sequel, the hero's success advances the policy of colonisation by gaining the favour of the host and establishing a network of Earthling allies. Both episodes provide touchstones for (post)colonial engagement with Larson's themes.

In the original series episode 'The Magnificent Warriors' (12 Nov 1978), Cylon raiders target the fleet's food supply, damaging agro ships and placing the journey in jeopardy. A *Galactica* entourage including leader Adama and fighter pilots Apollo and Starbuck (Dirk Benedict) must visit an independent human colony on the planet Sectar to secure new grain. Adama seeks to trade a power supply for the needed resource, but cautions that this machine, an 'energiser',



'The Magnificent Warriors', *Battlestar Galactica*.
Universal Studios.

must not contain Colonial markings. 'What we need is an old energiser with no markings at all', he explains, 'so no one will know who we are, and no one can sell us out to the Cylons'. Adama's reasoning is unclear. The Cylons relentlessly pursue a policy of human genocide and presumably would kill or torture the Sectar settlers rather than negotiating with them to 'sell out' the Colonials.

The Colonials' dealings with the Sectarans in turn bring them into contact with the indigenous alien species. As their name implies, these Boray resemble boars: short, porcine-looking creatures, they raid the human settlement on horseback, tossing spears at otherwise reasonable white men and stealing food so that they are not obliged to labour to cultivate sustenance for themselves. The episode uses a 'wild west' motif, casting the Sectar settlement as a frontier town complete with saloon, gambling space cowboys, a card-shark mayor and an ineffectual sheriff too weak to protect the town from the marauding natives. Viewers should not fail to associate the lance-wielding, hit-and-run Boray raiders with American Indians as depicted in cinema and television westerns that flourished from Hollywood well into the 1970s.⁷ The Colonials and the Sectarans agree that the Boray are 'odorous vermin', a 'good-for-nothing, lazy' people. The significant difference between Colonials and Sectarans is the Colonials' strength of will to face down this enemy. 'You're not like us', declares the Sectar leader, Bogon (Barry Nelson). 'You know what you have to do. I salute you for it'.

The mini-allegory intends to be humorous and thus does not explore the implications of this weighty statement in light of US policy such as the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which continued the enforced diaspora of indigenous peoples that had begun after first contact with Europeans centuries earlier. The association with American Indian diaspora may be incidental for viewers who

7. Examining 'American science fiction's frontier legacy', Geraghty compares the relationship between *Battlestar* Colonials and Cylons to 'the American colonial experience as played out between Puritan settlers and Indian inhabitants' (65).



'The Magnificent Warriors', *Battlestar Galactica*. Universal Studios.

detect contemporary lessons about American involvement in Vietnam, which ended in 1975 with the fall of Saigon and US evacuation. The flippant observation, 'You're not like us. You know what to do', may mirror the conservative right's political interpretation of ambivalence in mainstream America and its allies toward involvement in Vietnam, or it may represent a last parting shot, so to speak, at the population of South Vietnam, who, from this political perspective, were too dependent on US intervention and lacked the will to protect themselves. This possibility is borne out by the subplot that focuses on the town sheriff. Sheriffs serve for life, and the Boray have been killing sheriff after sheriff, so no local is willing take the position. The Sectaran leadership dupes Starbuck into becoming sheriff, and the technological and intellectual might of the Colonials easily overcomes the indigenous threat. Peace is made when Starbuck passes responsibility for the safeguarding of the Sectarans to the very Boray leader who has been waging war against them. The Colonials wash their hands of the affair, and fly on.

Several coincidences of the production uphold the association with Vietnam. The first is suggested by Slotkin's discussion of the conspicuous absence of war films about Vietnam.⁸ The same absence should be noted in *Battlestar Galactica*, which reflects Cold War policy but fails to comment decisively on one of America's most significant demonstrations of its will to do 'what you have to do'. After all, Larson conceived the show during the years of US entry into and escalation of conflict, and it began production shortly after US withdrawal. Slotkin explains the conflicted American attitude toward Vietnam as the reason

8. See also Anderegg (2–3), Auster and Quart (xiv–xv) and Lanning (45–52).

for Hollywood's avoidance of direct depiction, but he suggests that filmmakers used 'the tropes and symbols derived from the Western . . . to understand and control our unprecedented and dismaying experiences in Vietnam' (67). The same can be said of sf, of course.⁹ Slotkin's observation that 'the 'traditions' of Indian warfare' provided language for discussing the war – such as referring to Vietcong-controlled areas as 'Indian country', and Ambassador Maxwell Taylor's comparison of the pacification programme to 'plant[ing] corn outside the stockade when the Indians are still around' (67) – remains relevant, as evidenced in President Barack Obama's disclosure that the US special operations code name for Osama Bin Laden referenced the Apache freedom fighter and cultural hero Geronimo.

In this context, consider Larson's intertextual association between his telenovela, 'The Magnificent Warriors', and John Sturges's influential western, *The Magnificent Seven* (US 1960). In turn an explicit intertextualisation of Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (Japan 1954), *The Magnificent Seven* is the story of elite American gunfighters who come to the aid of a small village in Mexico to take on a local warlord. If Larson has this influence also in mind, the praise for Colonials who 'know what they have to do', spoken tongue-in-cheek, may attempt to replicate the complexity that Slotkin uncovers in Sturges's engagement with the theme of Vietnam:

Before Kennedy took office, before the Special Forces landed in Saigon, movie-makers had begun to imaginatively explore and test out the mythological and ideological premises that lay behind the counterinsurgency of the New Frontier. . . . By combining the political concerns of the new Cold War with the traditional terms of the Western, *Magnificent Seven* frames a vision which on the one hand rationalizes and justifies counter-insurgency, but which also exposes the contradictions and weaknesses of that ideology, and the military practices the policy begot. (76)

The entire episode of 'The Magnificent Warriors' can also be read as a comment on American counterinsurgency, explaining Adama's secrecy in providing technology that cannot be traced to the *Galactica*, the Colonials' duplicity in revealing their true identities to indigenous inhabitants of Sector, whether human or Boray, and the Colonials' hasty exit from the fight once it sets up the Boray in a position of political and military authority.

As evidence of *Galactica*'s engagement with the Cold War catastrophe of Vietnam, 'The Magnificent Warriors' follows the film and television trend that shunned direct engagement with the topic in favour of allegory. The legacy of Vietnam would have been apparent to *Galactica* producers and staff in first-hand

9. See Johnson-Smith (125–33) and Suvin (121–35).

witnessing of the diaspora of the Vietnamese people. The Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam was signed in 1973. Subsequently, emigration of Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese from Vietnam and Cambodia received constant media exposure, with refugees – often labelled ‘boat people’ – arriving to the US in major waves from 1977 through the early 1980s (Do 26–8). Southern California became a primary location, with the largest ‘Little Saigon’ in America founded in 1978 (the first year of original production) in Westminster, roughly 45 miles south of Los Angeles (Aguilar-San Juan xv–xvi). Aside from the allegorical implications of ‘The Magnificent Seven’, however, few traces suggest direct references to Vietnam, which is a customary omission for the time, as Slotkin and others point out.¹⁰

Recycling the basic premise of ‘The Magnificent Warriors’, the *Galactica* 1980 episode ‘Space Croppers’ offers another conflation of diaspora and contact narrative. Once again, Cylons attack the fleet’s agro ships, hoping that the Colonials will give away Earth’s position in a desperate attempt to restock food. Recalling the Apollo 11 reference made at the close of *Battlestar Galactica*, Neil Armstrong’s declaration, ‘That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind’, Adama declares, ‘After all these years. A giant step. We’re about to establish our first colony on the planet Earth.’ Setting aside the obvious implication of America’s own colonising impulse in being the first to plant its flag on the Moon, viewers must speculate about the effects of becoming colonised by a culture with superior technology. ‘This could be one of our most satisfying missions’, says Dillon (Barry Van Dyke), a Colonial fighter pilot and pretty-boy whose mild adventures on Earth mark him as a poster-child for family-hour entertainment of the era. ‘The establishment of one of our own colonies on Earth, a permanent place for the children, and fresh supplies for the fleet.’ It is clear that Earth has been othered and now functions to supply resources to the *Galactica*.

This episode is noteworthy for explicit treatment of racial tension. Here the diaspora heroes Troy (Kent McCord), who happens to be Adama’s grandson, and Dillon (Barry Van Dyke), Troy’s perpetual sidekick, come to the service of a Hispanic farmer, Hector Alonzo (Ned Romero). Alonzo is being deprived of water by neighbouring farmer John Steadman (Dana Elcar), who wants to

10. Allusions may include Starbuck’s quip that Cylon attempts to gain information through torture ‘won’t do any good’ because he has ‘had a course on resistance’. This scene in ‘Lost Planet of the Gods Part II’ is terse yet calls to mind the capture and imprisonment of downed US airmen imprisoned in the so-called Hanoi Hilton POW camp. Cylon Lucifer amalgamates pan-Asian stereotypes – including slanting diode eyes, red Chaofu gown, hypocritically servile demeanour and traditional kowtow – and may be intended to conflate associations with the People’s Republic of China, North Vietnam, the Soviet Union and the perceived threat of communism.



'Space Croppers', *Galactica 1980*. Universal Studios.

acquire Alonzo's land. Blustering, bigoted, rich and white, Steadman has 'no use for Hispanics' whom he thinks of (in Alonzo's words) as 'peasants' and 'wetbacks'.

Alonzo has placed an ad in the local paper putting up half his land for sale and requesting help. Troy and Dillon answer the ad and partner with Alonzo, all in order to establish the colonial enterprise that they keep hidden from Alonzo's family, who, Colonials assume, are too primitive to comprehend the fullness of the situation. The required comeuppance that Steadman experiences in illustrating the lesson against white supremacy seems disingenuous in this context, and other elements of the story strike a similar effect. For example, Hector's small son (Joaquin Garay) prays to the Lord to send someone to help his parents. Of course, the angels of mercy are Troy and Dillon, and their divine manifestation in answer to the boy's prayer recalls the erroneous narratives of first contact that have made generations believe that indigenous people thought white Europeans must be gods.¹¹

Colonial leadership at all levels consistently characterise Earthlings as 'primitive' throughout *Galactica 1980*. Such judgments are presented as matters of fact and are never ameliorated. Equally problematic is the attempt to portray Hispanics positively by depicting them as equating themselves with the colonisers who brought ruin to the peoples of North America. Explaining the proud tradition of the Latino people to his son, Alonzo points out, 'Our people settled this land long before the Anglos. We were the great pioneers of the West.' Asserting

11. Hearing the indigenous peoples refer to them as 'manitou', and limiting their understanding of that term to 'God', fifteenth- and sixteenth-century European explorers to North America believed that First Nations peoples thought of them as gods. Haefeli cites mistranslation to account for the confusion: 'The native accounts never claimed the Europeans were gods in any Christian sense of the term. Instead, their words (in this case Manitou) reflected an understanding of the power and danger of the encounter that the actual experience confirmed' (407).

equality in terms that replicate colonial superiority underscores the inseparability of colonisation and imperialism. One 'pioneer' supplants another in the rise and fall of nations: the *Galactica* story ignores Latino pioneer contact with the *indígena pura* of North America in favour of indicting subsequent white settlement 'that would eventually facilitate the nearly complete usurpation of land from all Mexicans in the region' (Limerick 236–40) while ironically imagining the next colonial enterprise by visitors from 'far, far away, amongst the stars'.

The original *Battlestar Galactica* draws the diaspora arc to a close on a Hispanic farmer's land in the San Fernando Valley of 1980. The Colonial diaspora culminates in an act of colonisation, which is the harbinger of imperialism (Abernathy 22). The human remnant that survived genocide by the Cylon empire at first regarded Earth in the way that diasporic people create 'an ideological construct, the product of collective memory or myth . . . the lost homeland they had never seen, but could only visualise in their imagination' (Esman 5). A generation later, the Colonials who reach Earth continue to define themselves in relation to the power of other empires: to the Cylons whose technology still presents a threat, and to the Earthlings whom they regard as a primitive and backwards host. In classical diaspora, the dispersed people, conquered and in exile, are in no position to dictate the terms of the relationship with their host, and they settle into a minority position that may lead to assimilation. Here the *Battlestar Galactica* storyline alters the classical pattern, presenting a dispersed people in exile that nevertheless has the power to colonise the host they encounter. Doing so effects the transformation of collective memory and myth, and the traumatic diaspora from a homeland can now be conceived of as the exodus to a promised land.



'Space Croppers', *Galactica* 1980. Universal Studios.

The transition from diaspora to exodus played out in the narrative arc connecting *Battlestar Galactica* to *Galactica 1980* in turn shifts ideological tone. Conceived in the climate of the Cold War, both series gave voice to American paranoia at the threat of Soviet aggression, which the shows allegorise as a prophetic warning in support of a ‘peace through strength’ political agenda (Muir 234). Whereas the original derived its narrative cohesion from the theme of maintaining an imperial balance of powers, the sequel evinced complacency about Colonial superiority, moved away from storylines that engage this theme and developed instead the familiar narrative of an empire on the frontier, infiltrating the indigenous Earthlings in stories that portend the act of colonisation. This shift may demonstrate one natural path of diaspora that defines the re-establishment of the homeland as the founding of a colony. However, in the interim between the final episode of the original on 29 April 1979 and the debut of the sequel on 27 January 1980, Ronald Reagan had declared his second bid for the American presidency; the entire *Galactica 1980* series was produced during the campaign that advertised the so-called Reagan Revolution to come. The tempering of *Battlestar* paranoia may anticipate the US–Soviet détente, symbolised most recognisably by the incoming administration’s grandstanding over the fall of the Berlin Wall less than a decade after the close of *Galactica 1980*.

Extrapolating the imperial agenda from the original *Battlestar Galactica* and its 1980 sequel underscores American narcissism that was fuelled by perceived military and economic superiority toward the end of the Cold War era. The events that inspired its reimagined application to current political and military realities have reintroduced an escalating paranoia that rivals, if not overreaches, vintage Cold War terror at the prospect of nuclear annihilation. Chalmers Johnson’s discussion of recent American history offers both context and prophecy:

Believing we had ‘won’ the Cold War, we became even less able to recognize our injustices toward others and instead assumed that our ‘good intentions’ in world affairs were self-evident. The result of our hubris was to transform our global reach into full-blown imperialism and our concern with national defence into full-blown militarism. In my judgment, both trends are so far advanced and obstacles to them so neutralized that our decline has already begun. Our refusal to dismantle our own empire of military bases when the menace of the USSR disappeared, and our inappropriate response to the blowback of September 11, 2001, makes this decline close to inevitable. (309–10)

If America is an empire in decline, it has reached one inevitable point in a renewable cycle. *Battlestar Galactica*, in its original and reimagined spaces, documents the evolution of imperialism in a world no longer terrorised by two superpowers. Whether points of departure toward a new paradigm will be remembered as diaspora or as exodus must remain a matter for future allegories.

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