J. Punt

Prof. J. Punt, Department Old & New Testament, Stellenbosch University, South Africa.
E-mail: jpunt@sun.ac.za,
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9488-7850

Paul, rhetorically gifted, or discursively manipulative?[1]

ABSTRACT

The rhetoric of the Pauline letters has garnered much interest over the years, and regardless of agreement with the positions expressed in the letters, Paul generally received praise for his adept communicative skills of persuasion. Appreciation for his rhetorical craft, however, should not prevent the recognition of Paul's deft handling of discourse, as if rhetorical skills and discursive goals are disconnected. Using discourse as a broader category than rhetoric, several instances of discourse manipulation, which at times remind us of imperialist discourse, are identified, including kinship language and ethnic stereotyping, military metaphors, as well as gendered power discourse and sexual slander, illustrated with examples mostly from Philippians.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Discourse manipulation, as calculated control over public opinion in the political, religious, social, or similar spheres, is an apparently simple notion, but allows for a wide-ranging scope. Discourse can result from the purposeful construction of a certain position, or inversely, by deliberately opposing alternatives to maintain a specific position. When discourse manipulation is considered beyond asserting or disavowing

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positions, further possibilities and questions emerge. Is discourse manipulated only where evidence of intentional control can be shown, or – as it has come to be acknowledged in gender, race, and other discourses – is social-structural control through master narratives, performativities, and the like not also some kind of manipulation? When does self-serving discourse manipulation become propaganda? Is it manipulative if society is, by and large, engaged in self-interested social discourse(s)? To ask this in a different way: Is it manipulation if the original audience did not recognise or experience it as such? Or, by contrast, is manipulation dependent on harsh, abrasive, or abusive language, necessarily marked by evil intent? With a bow to the Marxist versus Mannheim ideology debate, is discursive control only manipulation when abusing discourse for self-interest, or against social norms, or also in exercising influence over communities' thoughts and practices more generally? Such questions inform my brief investigation of Pauline discourse and its possible manipulative nature.

As was common cause with literary productions in Antiquity, New Testament texts reveal high levels of attention given to their invention and construction. Scholars have written a great deal on the rhetorical structure of the Pauline letters, and generally tend to praise Paul for his adept skills of persuasion – regardless of agreement with his convictions.[2] However, the line between persuasive rhetoric and discourse manipulation is not all that clear. Indeed, can all rhetoric not be plotted on a scale of manipulation, ranging from inappropriate to acceptable? If indeed, what determines the verdict, and wherein is manipulation situated? Is manipulation necessarily negative, or only when it runs contrary to the perceiver's position or perspective? Appreciation for Paul's rhetorical craft should not prevent the recognition of his deft handling of discourse, as if rhetorical skills and discursive goals are disconnected. After positing discourse as a broader category than rhetoric, this article explores the notion of discourse manipulation in the Pauline letters, by focusing on kinship language and ethnic stereotyping, the use of military metaphors, as well as gendered power discourse and sexual slander, all of which are briefly illustrated with examples mainly from the letter to the Philippians.[3]

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2   Scholars have highlighted various aspects of Pauline rhetoric in the past (Hansen 1989; Heil 2005; Penner & Lopez 2012), also referring to ulterior motives related to Pauline rhetoric (Given 2001). The role of rhetoric in ancient religion has been studied more widely (Papaioannou 2021).

3   Other forms and formats of, and aspects with regard to discourse manipulation in the Pauline letters will include Paul's so-called helter-skelter (Hays 1989) use of the Scriptures of Israel; Paul's frequent appeals that communities follow his example; the Deutero-Paulines' adjustments of original Pauline notions, and so forth.

2. RHETORIC, DISCOURSE, AND PAUL

Pauline rhetoric has often been the topic of scholarly research and discussion.[4] Popular distinctions view ancient rhetoric as the art of using language and public speaking, in particular, as a means to persuade, while discourse refers more broadly to the conglomerate of verbal exchange or conversation. However, in this instance, discourse is used with a still wider berth. Discourse is not primarily about language conveying information; it is about action and affiliation (Gee 2005:1), constituting reality rather than representing or reflecting it. A broader understanding expands discourse to include the social reality(-ies) of those involved, including personal and group consciousness, and relations established through language. Discourse is the sum total of institutionalised representations.[5]

> A discourse is a regulated set of statements which combine with others in predictable ways. Discourse is regulated by a set of rules which lead to the distribution and circulation of certain utterances and statements. ... Rather than seeing discourse as simply a set of statements which have some coherence, we should, rather, think of a *discourse as existing because of a complex set of practices which try to keep them in circulation* and other practices which try to fence them off from others and keep those other statements out of circulation (Mills 2003:54, emphasis added).

More than simply language, or only the argument's content and structure, discourse also refers to the accompanying and enabling social structures and practices.

Discourse's creative force gives rise to a pluriform range of meanings and a pluralism of symbolic universes, requiring attention for the involvement of power in its rhetorical functioning. This involves, *inter alia*, the investigation into how meaning is constructed, considering who benefits from the discourse, and exploring whose interests are served. In fact, the types of envisioned worlds, the promotion of roles, duties, and

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4   Typically, rhetorical critics focus on Paul's letters in light of Greek rhetorical conventions and their relevance for his rhetorical argumentation, identifying the particular genre of his letters in light of Greek and Roman speech (for example, judicial, deliberative or epideictic), and identifying the four rhetorical parts of letters (*exordium*, *narration*, *probation*, and *peroration*). See, for example, the essays in Olbricht & Eriksson (2005) and Watson (1988:57). For criticism about over-claiming the value of rhetorical criticism, see Reed (1997:306-307).

5   "The idea that identities are discursive constructions is underpinned by a view of language in which there are no essences to which language refers and therefore no essential identities" (Barker 1999:23-24).

values, the legitimisation of social-political practices, and the accountability of discourse communities all form part of discourse (Schüssler Fiorenza 1999:27). The value of applying such notions to the Pauline letters, with their aim to encourage an identity formed around Christ, and an associated world view and ethos, is clear.[6] Rather than thinking of Paul pursuing a theological programme in the modern convictional sense of the word, the thrust of his letters was more practical – typical of "religion" in the 1st century – namely, the promotion of a new (renewed) social location for community members, both insiders and outsiders. That is, Paul's letters did not so much advocate a kind of doctrinal position, but intended to script out parameters for living in, and as a community of Jesus followers. However, a spin-off of Paul's attempts to forge a single community, ironically, was the formation of a politics or discourse of Othering.[7] Even in one letter, it is not difficult to point out how Paul's rhetoric upheld uniformity or sameness (1 Cor. 11:1), denouncing certain forms of difference (1 Cor. 7:17), and effectively erasing others through silence (1 Cor. 14:33b-38). It advocated for community cohesion achieved through self-regulation and outright self-denial (Polaski 1999:136). The Pauline discourse of Othering was embedded in the 1st-century imperial context of oppression and want, marked by dispossession and tyranny, in which communities were only too aware of who and what belongs, and why. Discourse manipulation offers a valuable hermeneutic framework for the investigation of Paul's letters that were situated in the imperial context, steeped in power, and concerned with control, particularly in relation to defining the boundaries and the practices of Jesus follower communities.

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6   This is not to argue for the historical existence of the so-called third race, which, as Zetterholm (2012:373-393) argues, may have remained little more than a laudable dream.

7   A case can be made for Paul's advocacy of the inclusivity of the reign of God and its earthly manifestations, as noted, for example, in Romans 1:14 and 13:1-14 (Jewett 2000:62-68). However, Paul often conditioned such inclusiveness on the communities' adherence to his visions, interpretations, and practices, granting individuals within his communities access to spiritual knowledge not available to others. For an example of this ambiguity, consider Paul's explanation of the covenant in Galatians, which is inherently exclusive, implying insiders and outsiders. The reference to "Jerusalem above" (Gal. 4:26) entails divine origin, but not necessarily "an invisible people, to whom all races belong in their diversity" (Dunn 1993:249). The choice is not for or against Jews, for or against Gentiles, but an inclusive choice for all people (see Park 2003) – but such inclusion was, according to the requirements, on the authority of Paul's understanding.

3. MANIPULATIVE DISCOURSE, PAUL AND POWER

Paul's discourse was manipulative in many ways, not unlike discourse generally, and became explicit through its rhetoric of Othering (see also Punt 2010). Paul did not introduce a new, universal concept of a person but rather adapted the existing imperial model to encompass all humanity (Schüssler Fiorenza 2000:46). The concept of a universal subject served as a norm in hegemonic discourses, leading to the establishment and justification of hierarchies, the implementation of control mechanisms through systems of power and subjugation, and the invocation of an authoritative discourse to portray hegemonic practices as natural or divinely ordained – such are the driving forces of a discourse of Othering.[8] The concept of Othering significantly influenced identity formation and development, as individuals constructed their self-perception in contrast to the "other". Otherness, again, was characterised by the inability to determine and establish one's own psychological, social, and cultural identity (Stimpson 1992:252).

Paul's letters provide insights into the social hierarchies and identity dynamics of his time, exploring the concepts of "Self" and "Other", sharing in these constructive but often ambivalent energies. Stereotyping and labelling people, either as individuals or groups, and employing vilification or rhetorical derision were common practices in the New Testament era, serving as tools for negotiating identity and establishing social boundaries (Du Toit 1994; Freyne 1985; Johnson 1989). Claiming a shared identity implied difference; constructing the self-invoked and construed others (see Lieu 2004:15). Pauline discourse was heavily invested in identity construal, as is evident from several key aspects in his letters, such as Philippians.[9] The choice is deliberate, since Philippians is known as Paul's joyful letter, composed ostensibly during Paul's incarceration (ἔν ... τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου, 1:7; τοὺς δεσμούς μου, 1:13), an interesting contrast that often receives attention. Given the friendly, joyful tone, Philippians is probably the least suspected of discourse manipulation.[10]

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8   The relationship between the formation and transformation of biblical texts and the dynamic nature of identity formation is apparent (see Wills 2008:3).

9   Paul's letters, like other New Testament documents, reflect the social contexts and perceptions of identity that encompass questions about who or what constitutes "Self" and "Other" engaging in these constructive but often ambivalent dynamics (see Punt 2010).

10 The entanglements between emotion and persuasion are rife in a range of ancient materials (Sanders & Johncock 2016) and warrant further attention, but space does not allow further investigation.

3.1   Ethnic and kinship language

The Pauline rhetoric of Othering rested both upon strong insider positions and the vilification of the Other, amidst the ambivalent role of Others within the 1st-century Roman context. Paul's strong invective emerges in Philippians 3:2-11, directed against the dogs (τοὺς κύνας),[11] the evildoers (τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας), and the mutilation (τὴν κατατομήν). This is followed by Paul's listing of his Jewish credentials, which he in Christ has come to regard as ζημία (loss) (Phil. 3:7) and even worse, σκύβαλα (excrement, Phil. 3:8).[12] Scholars have different perspectives on the identity of those against which Paul was arguing in this context. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the significance of Jewish practices for early Christians was a key point of disagreement. Paul did not support or reject a rigid and fixed concept of "Judaism's essence", which reduced ethnicity to inherent characteristics based on factors such as bloodline, family ties, concrete land connections, historical ancestry, language, culture, religion, or origin myths (Wan 2007:246-247).[13] Although Paul did not rigidly define ethnicity, he drew clear lines between insiders and outsiders. For instance, in contrast to his directives aimed at certain members of his Jewish community elsewhere (Gal. 2:11-21), in Philippians 2 Paul opposed the demand for Gentile Christians to undergo circumcision, confirming the flexible nature of ethnicity. Ethnic identity was not static but rather adapted to the context and the interests of those who invoked it. Beyond its conceptual flexibility, ethnicity was intertwined with other social factors and played a crucial role in shaping debates in Paul's writings.[14]

Interlinked with ethnic categories and at a devolved level, kinship terms fed into Paul's identity construction-discourse.[15] Household (οἶκος, οἰκία) and kinship terms (including ἀδελφός) were identity-focused notions in a broader terminological constellation, including terms such as γένος, ἔθνος, λαός, and φυλή. The household-based discourse established particularly the one side of the argument, to sketch out who belonged and who were

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11   "Jewish teaching considered dogs unclean and sometimes sexually immoral; the Old Testament applies the title to male cult prostitutes (Deut. 23:17). Such a title would certainly make the pietists who were demanding circumcision recoil" (Keener 1993:562-563).

12   See also other conflicting references to "the Jews" in the Pauline writings (for example, 1 Thess. 2 and Gal. 1-4 vs Rom. 9-11).

13   Even ethnic identity is a social construct, since "ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristic of organizing interaction between people" (Barth 1969:10).

14   Ethnicity is often used in constellations and formations of culture, politics, religion, and economics. For the ancient context, see Nasrallah & Schüssler Fiorenza (2009); Baumann (2004) on framing identity through others.

15   The basis of Paul's family terminology is traditionally viewed as situated in the relationship between Christ and God (see Bossmann 1996:163-167).

part of the insider group. Paul described his relationship with Timothy as that of a father to a son (ὡς πατρὶ τέκνον, Phil. 2:22), which can be extended to Paul's fatherhood of the community. Such claims were not uncommon; already in his earliest letter, Paul described himself as "father" of the community (1 Thess. 2:11). The father metaphor could indicate authority (see Castelli 1991:101) and intimacy (Holmberg 1978:77-79). This means that, in the 1st century, these connotations were not necessarily mutually exclusive (Frilingos 2000:103, fn. 60).[16] The notion of God as a father was a familiar concept among Jews at the time, supported by the scriptures of Israel (see 1 Chron. 17:13; Ps. 68:5; Jer. 31:9), and included elements of trust, intimacy and tenderness.[17] God's fatherly role is abundantly clear in the letters (Rom. 1:7, 8:14-17; 1 Col. 1:3, 4:14-15; Gal. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:1-2, 4-5; Phil. 1:2, 2:12-15), and as God's representative and founder of the communities, also Paul's as (surrogate) father (White 1999:163).[18]

In Paul's writings, God is portrayed not only as a father figure within the familial structure but also as the creator of the community and of the whole of humanity. As a result, believers are viewed as both fellow citizens and siblings, united under the divine parentage of God.[19] The connections between these two sets of metaphors were apparent in the 1st century, as the individual household also served as the fundamental political entity in the classical city-state.[20] Apart from other references to "brother(s)" (Phil. 1:14; 2:24), Paul addressed the community as "brothers" in Philippians

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16   The tense balance between authority and closeness is exacerbated by the fact that the other three times that Paul used "father" in Philippians (1:2; 2:11; 4:20) refer to God.

17   The existence of these characteristics in ancient fatherhood did not imply that fatherhood should be interpreted as a sentimental metaphor for the contemporary notion of the "cool dad" (see Buckel 1993:182).

18   Notwithstanding Paul's penchant for paternal images to describe his relationship to communities, he used a decidedly maternal – and complicated – metaphor τέκνα μου, οὓς πάλιν ὠδίνω (my little children, with whom I am again in travail) to portray both the community's reliance on him and his anguish for them (Gal. 4:19) (Osiek 1992:333-337).

19   Paul was drawn to a more appealing representation of God as the originator or progenitor of a fresh, spiritual community that may have stemmed from the analogous connection he could establish between Abraham and Christ. It could also have been influenced by his Jewish beliefs or perhaps was due to the parallels he observed between the rejected Christ and the childless Abraham and Sarah (White 1999:168).

20   Motivated by the city-state's dedication to protecting all its family units, legal codes were developed, and the city eventually replaced the clan as the primary provider of protection and loyalty. Imperial ideology presents the emperor as the "Father of his country" (White 1999:166-167). The articulation of self-identity and status took various forms, seemingly influenced by factors such as the writing style of the particular New Testament author, the exigency that was addressed, the nature of the community, and the relevance to the message being communicated. With no preferential expression of belonging, Paul (like the Johannine letters) often resorted to sibling language.

1:1; 3:1, 13, 17; 4:1, 8, 21. Sibling-like bonds are believed to have been encouraged by such language in the communities addressed by the biblical writers (Bartchy 1999:70). Family-type relationship terms, references to Onesimus as "child" and to Paul as "father", or the use of "brother" and "sister" (1 Thess. 3:22; Philem. 2) are considered indications not only of concern for the community, but also of equal relations.[21] Mutual personal commitment manifested further in possessive pronouns ("my" brother, 1 Cor. 8) or qualifying adjectives or participles ("beloved" brothers, Phil. 4:1).[22] Closing sections of Paul's letters such as Romans 16 provide further evidence of his consistent use of family life analogies, including terms such as "father", "mother", and "nurse". These analogies played a crucial role in shaping Paul's teachings, providing conceptual frameworks for defining the identity and relationships of believers. This familial language had a significant impact on the group dynamics and everyday behaviour of early Christians. Kinship ties and social connections were deeply intertwined with other aspects of 1st-century life such as economic matters (Oakman 1996:128), gender dynamics, and the influence of the military context.

3.2   Military metaphors

The frequent use of military metaphors in Roman society was less a reflection of constant warfare than an indication of the pervasive military influence on people's everyday lives. The Roman Empire's practice of settling retired soldiers in strategic locations such as Philippi likely contributed to the widespread use of military language and customs. Paul himself employed military metaphors in his writings, referring to himself and the Philippian community as engaged in the "contest" (ἀγών) (Phil. 1:30; see 1 Thess. 2:2). This term, originating from military and athletic contexts, was also used by Greek and Roman philosophers to describe human moral striving towards truth and virtue (Collins 2008:36-38). The military allusion is clear in Philippians 2:25 when Paul refers to Epaphroditus, one

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21   The assertion that patriarchal social values and egalitarian social structures were not antithetical in the 1st century, and that Paul was anti-patriarchal but not egalitarian (Bartchy 1999:77) rests on the mistaken assumption that patriarchy is confined to the semantic domain of kinship and egalitarianism to the semantic domain of politics. Kinship terminology did not denote egalitarian relationships, even if the hierarchical patterns that inevitably existed were not always rigidly defined (see Osiek 2009:147). See also criticism by Horrell (2001:297, fn. 17).

22   In situations where an elder brother took on a more fatherly role, he could also be addressed as "father" (for example, *P. Par.* 47.1)(see Keener 2000:356). The possibility of confluence in father-brother identities poses a serious challenge to Bartchy's (1999:77) contention regarding Paul's emphasis on siblinghood without patriarchal father figure, except God of course: "a family of siblings without an earthly father".

of his fellow workers, as a brother and his fellow soldier (συστρατιώτην μου).[23] Military imagery in Philippians may be explained with reference to the military's role in Paul's imprisonment in Philippi (Phil. 1:13; 4:22), as well as to Philippi's military provenance (Collins 2008:63).[24] However, the complex interplay between socio-political aspects such as ancient economics, gender, and empire reveals how, in a wider, interdependent world, military metaphors served to reinforce a pervasive system of subordination and control (Marchal 2005:281). While military metaphors are not directly used against outsiders, their frequent use in Pauline writings indicates that the pervasiveness of military culture had a significant impact on the social consciousness of the time. This pervasive awareness of military concepts extended beyond the physical presence of the army and its influence on social life and economics.

Pauline military imagery highlights the Roman army's ambivalent, often detrimental influence on communities and its enduring effects. In a manner reminiscent of postcolonial mimicry, Paul employed military imagery to further his ministry, often presenting values that contrasted with those of the Empire. His use of military images as metaphors, rather than references to specific military events, suggests that he repurposed imperial language for his own agenda, leveraging the potency of a counter-discourse of symbols to counter the dominance of imperial imagery (see Collins 2008; Zanker 1990; Lopez 2012).[25] The persistent ambiguity of such a situation of unequal power dynamics such as Paul's positive use of slavery metaphors to describe the Christian life, despite slavery's dehumanising nature, shows discursive manipulation with the side effects in terms of the impact of Roman politics and military systems on early Christian communities going unheeded.[26]

Paul's metaphorical language neither provides nor depends on accurate real-life scenarios, discouraging misplaced attempts at

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23   Military commanders used συστρατιώτης as honorific address to praise their troops. Caesar used *commilitiones* (Suetonius, *Julius* 67) and Brutus used συστρατιώται to address his troops in 42 BCE in Philippi (Appian, *Civil Wars* 4.117) (see Collins 2008:62-63). In Philemon 2, Paul refers to Archippus as a συστρατιώτης, which indicates that the metaphor was not determined by locality.

24   Victorious in battle in 42 BCE, veterans from Octavian and Marc Anthony's armies, as well as the Praetorian Guard after Octavian's victory over Anthony in 31 BCE, settled in Philippi. Octavian set up 28 such veteran colonies in Italy (Rankov 2007:35).

25   Pauline military imagery reached full development in the Pastorals, with their call to become God's soldiers. The correspondence between τὴν καλὴν στρατείαν (1 Tm 1:18); καλὸς στρατιώτης Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ (2 Tim. 2:3), ἀγωνίζου τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα τῆς πίστεως (1 Tim. 6:12), and τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα ἠγώνισμαι (2 Tim. 4:7) is evident (see Pfitzner 1967:165-171).

26   Slavery and military imagery are related to war as a principal source of slavery. The Roman *Digesta* 1.5.4.2-3 explains that slaves (*servi*) are called that because generals preferred taking captives and preserving (*servare*) rather than killing them (see Harrill 2006:30).

reconstructions. Employing military imagery suggests familiarity with the Empire's war machine and propaganda, and with literary *topoi* of moral philosophers. The adoption of military metaphors marked a significant transformation in the self-perception of a sizable portion of the early Christian community (Hobbs 1995:255). The mimical use of concepts aligned with Empire reframed the social world and its inhabitants from a constructivist perspective, highlighting the intertwined nature of life under Empire.[27] Paul's discourse of Othering employs military metaphors to establish self-identity. The metaphorical usage of harmful concepts such as slavery or war for positive purposes suggests contexts wherein systems such as slavery and enterprises like war were valued even by those negatively impacted by such systems and enterprises. For Paul and the communities he addressed, the inclusion of military imagery in Pauline discourse simultaneously evoked the army's role in social life and its destruction of land and life – and reinforced the gendered discourse of the time (see also Punt 2016).

3.3   Gender(ed) discourse in imperial times

Othering was decidedly a gendered affair. Military images in Paul's letters cannot escape the link between violence and war,[28] nor their imposition of a masculine sense of identity,[29] indicative of a broader gender(ed) focus in Pauline discourse. Martin's (2005:10) claim that gender in Late Antiquity was "socially constructed, textually inscribed, and literarily interpreted" is already applicable to Paul's concern with identity. Gender co-determined ancient social standing, and the construction of identity through soldiery meant a claim to power, a kind of "warrior masculinity" (James 2011:54). Ancient rhetoricians associated military prowess, manliness, and mastery with virtue, or a sense of good (Gunderson 2009:119).[30] Military imagery functioned in a context wherein

> a man (or a state) was judged as good at something (*agathos*) or as possessing *arete* (excellence) to the extent that he demonstrated superiority over others (Roisman 2005:67).

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27   "Colonial mimicry" is a concept coined by Bhabha (1994:85-92). It at once indicates "the ethical gap between the normative vision of post-Enlightenment civility and its distorted colonial (mis) imitation", and becomes the "sly weapon of anti-colonial civility, and ambivalent mixture of deference and disobedience".

28   "The name for strength in action, in traditional male terms, is violence. And the name for the violent action of men in groups is war" (Clines 2003:184).

29   Gender-based appeals accompany the three Pauline passages in which military language is strongest (1 Cor. 16:13; Eph. 6:10; 2 Tim 2:1; see Hobbs 1995:249).

30   In Quintillian's *Institutes*, the constant recalling of military metaphors produces a subtext to the text as a whole, by insisting on the excellence, appeal, and authority of public speaking (Gunderson 2009:119).

True manliness was someone's bodily ability and mettle, which explains both the militaristic nature of Roman society and *virtus*' extensive use to express courage across a wide semantic range (McDonnell 2003:236). Military exploits informed the construction of masculinity and differences between men and women. Individuals used war images in constructing their personalities (Sidebottom 2004:10).

> Paul is no warrior, but he is a traditional male, and he participates in violence in the ways open to him, given the historical and social setting supplied for him in texts by him and about him (Clines 2003:184).[31]

The Pauline discourse is gendered beyond military links, with androcentric leanings: Paul claiming fatherhood of the communities, the preference for fraternal language in reference to community members (as mentioned earlier), and elsewhere marital imagery wherein Paul presents the community as bride to her husband (for example, 2 Cor. 11:2-3). The negative undertones towards women in gendering the community relate among others to the narrative of Eve's seduction. Beyond historical appeals, Paul prominently grounded his argument about gender distinctions in nature and used it to make ontological claims. This strategy was powerful in supporting the superiority or inferiority of people, divided according to gender, in a world where identity was hotly contested (Vander Stichele & Penner 2005:308). Such gender dualism constructs both cohere in, and undermine other dualistic oppositions insofar as it casts all speaking subjects (Paul, the opponents, contemporary interpreters, and so on) as masculine and construe their audience (the Corinthian community, Judaism, or contemporary readers, and so forth) in feminine terms as passive, immature, and gullible (Schüssler Fiorenza 2000:47). Such sentiments probably inform Paul's instructions regarding the two women, Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2-3), as the only community members to be reprimanded explicitly.[32]

These examples of discursive manipulation, ethnic and kinship language, military metaphors, and gendered discourse functioned within the Roman imperial context, which is perhaps more explicitly visible in

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31   Reflecting prevailing views, where ethnic groups were often stereotyped and associated with specific behaviours and characteristics, 1 Thess. 4:3-7 reinforces the idea that the nations were unable to control their desires, particularly in terms of sexual conduct. This stereotype was a common tool used to justify imperialistic expansion and control, as it painted these groups as inferior and in need of guidance.

32   Only women are singled out by name for reprimand in the letter, unless, of course, those criticised in Philippians 3:2 were also from the community; scholarly opinion is divided as to whether they were travelling "Judaising" Jesus follower missionaries, members of the community, or maybe even Jewish missionaries.

Philippians than in many other Pauline letters, given the references to the Praetorian Guard (Phil. 1:13) and Caesar's household (Phil. 4:22).[33] Similar to Romans, 1 Thessalonians, and 1 Corinthians, Philippians comes across as politically provocative when reflected against Empire and its claims. At once personal and relational but also political and subversive,[34] the letter's central exhortation is to sustain unwavering loyalty to Christ and the commonwealth established through him. Μόνον ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε (Specifically, be a citizen body worthy of the good message of Christ, Phil. 1:27a), Paul wrote, adding also ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει (because our citizenship/commonwealth is in heaven, Phil. 3:20). Ambiguities remain amidst these assertions: Paul's preoccupation with the community's internal life and its citizenship is as clear as his insistence that it be shaped by Christ through humility, hospitality, care, and unity as fundamental pillars, in contrast to Roman society's consumerism, status-seeking, self-promoting glory, and moral decay (Zerbe 2012:19). However, the hymn to Christ (Phil. 2:6-11) is embedded in claims that assert the power of another lord, besides the emperor, for a community that became a "colony of heaven" (Phil. 3:20), an advance guard of the project to bring the entire world under the sovereign rule of Israel's God. Imperialist manipulation appears to rub off its indelible impact on others, with Pauline discourse influenced by, and using its mechanisms.

4. CONCLUSION: PAULINE RECEPTION AS DISCOURSE MANIPULATION

In the subsequent history of interpretation, Paul's compromising Othering discourse became more troublesome when the letters were given normative status, a move that aided the discourse of generalising Christianity, a trend that prevails to this day. Pauline sentiments and reception have had an enduring presence in Christian identity construction, given how such interpretation is steeped in identity concerns, including the ongoing debate about his Jewishness and relationship to the Torah.[35] The danger

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33 For an interesting essay on Paul's engagement with the Roman authorities in Philippians, see Oakes (2002:139): "Paul remaps the universe and consequently remaps both Philippian society and the future. Rome, the emperor (and even Jupiter) are replaced in the positions of decisive authority by Christ. Paul urges the Philippians to look at their world and see a new reality".

34 Not necessarily rebellious or seditious, "Philippians is an exhortation (discourse) on the 'practice of Messianic citizenship'" (Zerbe 2012:20), which is subversive in offering a contrasting alternative to the Roman imperial norm.

35 Boyarin (1994:228-260) puts it succinctly: "[Paul's discourse on the Law and Judaism is] forever caught in a paradox of identity and difference", criticising the coercive "universalising" or multicultural transformation of Jewish tradition. He argues that Paul generalised Jewishness to the extent that he ultimately destroyed it.

of interpretive manipulation grows exponentially when the socio-historical context of New Testament texts is left unaccounted for, and when texts are made to toe interpreters' theological lines, obedient to secondary interpretive frameworks, however valuable and constructive they may be deemed to be otherwise.[36] Then, all too easily, it is assumed that the values of our postmodern society such as equality, democracy, and human dignity were the ideals also of ancient people. Neglecting socio-historical contexts in textual interpretation, especially "sacred" texts, leads to anachronism in the absolute sense of the word, by postulating a "general human being" that considers people of all times and of geo-graphical contexts to subscribe to the same norms, values, and morals (see Punt 2017).[37]

To return to our initial question, are all forms of discourse, by nature, manipulative? If discourse is indeed about action and affiliation, about language that formats social reality, including people's consciousness and relations, if discourse is the sum total of institutionalised representations, discourse is necessarily about manipulation in the sense of calculated control over public opinion in various spheres. In an ancient context, where a premium was placed on rhetoric as persuasive speech, manipulation through discourse was virtually unavoidable and the extent to which manipulation was experienced as coercive or negative depended largely on concurrence with the argument. The Pauline literature, acknowledged for its rhetorical finesse, is an example of discourse manipulation, marked by its concern to exercise influence over its addressees. Pauline manipulation of discourse involved identity formative notions, availing itself, among others, of kinship language, gendered power discourse and sexual slander, imperialist mimicry and metaphors of war, whereby Paul reinvented a counter-reality of apocalyptic proportions for his letters' recipients. This counter-narrative was established through a powerful, manipulative discourse that included the stereotyping and vilification of those favouring other realities – the effect of which is often still felt nowadays!

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36 It is a tragedy that "in the comfortable, symbiotic dualism of later Christendom, heaven became the soul's spiritual homeland and destination, whereas the empire could claim the full allegiance of the embodied person on earth" (Zerbe 2012:5-6).

37 Modern-day interpretative communities must constantly discern the moment in which to engage texts, whether to adopt the authoritative stance claimed by Paul or the submissive position demanded of the communities he addressed, considering also whether the attitudes associated with these roles remain relevant in the present context (Polaski 2005:80-81).

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