Reading the People as a Subaltern Character in 2 Kings 7[1)]

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Introduction

1－2 Kings provide accounts of the reigns of all the kings of Israel and Judah, from the united kingdom of David and Solomon through the destruction of Judah by the Babylonians in 587/586 BCE. This is a component of a larger narrative history of Israel, the so-called Deuteronomistic History, also known as the Former Prophets in the Jewish tradition. Interestingly, the extended middle section of the books of Kings, the collection of the Elijah-Elisha cycle in 1 Kings 17 – 2 King 9, bears none of the marks of the Deuteronomistic historian.[2)] Thus, these stories, which are often categorized as "folk legends," attest to a social life that has not necessarily been brought under royal control. Hence, these stories may even function as accounts of "civil disobedience" and inherently subversive affronts to royal power.[3)]

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1) This is a revised version of Chapter 5 of the author's dissertation (Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley) submitted on May 2018.

2) Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 152.

3) Ibid., 153-154.

2 Kings 7:1–20 stands out as one of the illustrative narratives that demonstrate the subversive and folkloric features mentioned above. Robert LaBarbera presents a way of reading 2 Kings 6:8–7:20 as a satire of the royal authorities by applying rhetorical criticism and sociological models. LaBarbera argues that "expressions of a fundamental social antagonism between the ruling elite and the subservient peasants" appear when reading the literary dimensions of the Elijah-Elisha cycle of 1 and 2 Kings from a sociological perspective.[4)]

Scholars have primarily paid attention to the major characters of this narrative. For example, the deity (Yahweh) has been the focus in studies that feature the fulfillment of the word of Yahwe h.[5)] The king has been center stage in studies emphasizing the ineffectiveness of the royal power[6)] and the inadequacy of the king and the house of Omri.[7)] Further, many studies have regarded the prophet Elisha as the centerpiece in the confrontation between the king and the prophet.[8)] However, what has not been traditionally examined is the anonymous and silent characters who often are thought to be merely literary props.

The present paper thus seeks a close reading of the people as a minor (subaltern) character in 2 Kings 7:16–20 through the lens of literary studies of minor characters and subaltern studies. In conjunction with the exposition of subaltern concepts

4) Robert LaBarbera, "The Man of War and the Man of God: Social Satire in 2 Kings 6:8-7:20," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46 (1984), 637.

5) T. Raymond Hobbs, *2 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 86.

6) Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1987), 191.

7) Marvin A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 312.

8) Robert L. Cohn, *2 Kings*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 48.

relevant to the minor characters, the people in this story, a literary assessment aids in investigating these features. Employing theoretical principles developed by Alex Woloch, this study conducts a close literary scrutiny of the people and explores the characteristics of subalternity embedded in the minor and subaltern character in the narrative in terms of both the literary and sociological dimensions. This study presents sociohistorical research on the world in the text in order to understand the backgrounds that inform the serious circumstances of war, famine, and siege that the subaltern character are facing. Based on insights from subaltern studies theorists, the study collaborates a new and expanded meaning of the concept of subaltern. In the process, it will provide a framework for an alternative reading strategy for promoting a more democratic and inclusive interpretation of biblical narratives.[9)]

1. Literary Studies of Minor Characters and Subaltern Studies[10)]

9) For a discussion of an alternative scheme in contemporary biblical interpretation, see Koog-Pyoung Hong, "Towards the Hermeneutics of Responsibility," *Canone&Culture* 6:2 (2012), 109-135.

10) Since the late 1990s, the concept of subaltern has been introduced and widely researched by several Korean scholars in a variety of fields that include historical studies and literary studies. For instance, Taek-Hyeon Kim initiated discussions on the significant aspects of subaltern peasant revolts in colonial India suggested by Ranajit Guha's Subaltern Studies. Also, several scholars have utilized the notion and aspects of the subaltern in their analysis of some Korean novels. In the field of theological studies, Soon-Yang Choi presented articles addressing Asian Feminist Theology and Minjung Theology in conjunction with Spivak's Subaltern. However, relatively few researches have studied subaltern figures appearing in biblical narratives. See Soon-Yang Choi, "A Critical Suggestion for Asian Feminist Theology and Minjung Theology from the Perspective of Spivak's Subaltern," *Theological Forum* 72 (2013), 229-262.

1.1. The Characteristics of Minor Characters

The influence of the postmodern ethos,[11] which turns attention away from the center to the margins in narrative, encourages commentators to shift their attention from major characters to minor ones. With a critical awareness of the limited attention paid to some characters, Alex Woloch notes the tension between the protagonist (the one) in the center and the minor characters (the many) on the periphery.[12] He explains the two dominant ways in which minor characters are formed:

> The descriptive conventions that arise around minorness depict the symptoms of such disjunction, which takes two dominant forms: engulfing of an interior personality by the delimited signs that express it and the explosion of the suffocated interior being into an unpresentable, fragmentary, symptomatic for m.[13]

Moreover, Woloch describes the flat character as "reduced to a single function use within the narrative" and the fragmentary character as the character "who plays a disruptive, oppositional role within the plot."[14] Woloch notes that the minor character is smoothly absorbed as a gear within the narrative. Indeed, Woloch problematizes delimiting minor characters as a merely functional device (gear) within the context of asymmetric character-systems. Furthermore, Woloch states that "[t]he minor

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11) See A. K. M. Adam, ed., *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 160-66. See specifically the essay on Lyotard by Gina Hens-Piazza, which raises questions about the legitimacy of categories that designate some characters as major or protagonist. See also the three features of postmodernism discussed in A. K. M. Adam, *What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 5-16.

12) Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Character and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 18.

13) Ibid., 24.

14) Ibid., 25.

character is always drowned out within the totality of the narrative; and what we remember about the character is never detached from how the text, for the most part, makes us forget him."[15] Woloch's identification of minor characters with those who are reduced to a merely functional device and drowned out within the narrative resonates with the features of subaltern which will be discussed in the following section.

1.2. The Meaning of Subaltern and Subaltern Characters

Concerning the term "subaltern," Michèle Barrett gives a brief history as follows: "The word has a very specific history in relation to the British Army, where it denoted an officer below the rank of Captain. In the First World War the subaltern officers were typically Second Lieutenants, in charge of a platoon of twenty men."[16] Later, the term was expanded to refer to the proletariat, peasants, and non-elite by Antonio Gramsci and Ranajit Guha.[17] In addition, Gayatri C. Spivak transformed the meaning of the term into a more abstract term referring

15) Ibid., 38.

16) Michèle Barrett, "Subalterns at War: First World War Colonial Forces and the Politics of the Imperial War Graves Commission," in *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 160.

17) See Gnana Patrick, "Subaltern Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics: Multicultural Perspectives*, ed. E. P. Mathew (Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publications, 2009), 247-250. Patrick says, "The term subaltern means a position of inferior rank in military parlance, which was the original context of the usage of the term. Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist of repute, used this term in his discussion of Marxian philosophy to address the non-capitalist, non-bourgeoisie subordinate classes or groups, the proletariat, the peasants, the lumpen masses, etc., that were 'non-hegemonic' in nature during the stage prior to the emergence of their critical consciousness."

to those who are beyond the possibility of representation. In particular, Spivak emphasizes that subalterns are those who are erased and removed from the dominant society.[18] Thus, when John Beverley introduces the concept of subaltern studies, he claims that subaltern studies is about power and that power is related to representation.[19] He quotes Spivak, saying that "if the subaltern could speak – that is, speak in a way that really mattered to us – then it wouldn't be subaltern."[20] Guha, however, notes another aspect of the concept of subaltern. He regards the general attribute of *subordination* as one of the constitutive terms in a binary relationship.[21] In this sense, the feature of subordination of subaltern corresponds to that of minor characters discussed above, as such, leads to the clear connection between subalternity and minorness. Hence, in the sense that minor characters are treated as secondary and subordinate figures to major ones, they may be called subaltern characters.

2. A Close Reading of 2 Kings 7:16–20 with Focus on the People

2.1. A Brief History of Interpretation of 2 Kings 7:16–20

This study investigates one nameless and voiceless minor (subaltern) character: the people. The people, in the episode of 2 Kings 7:16–20, have not received as much attention in

18) See Drucilla Cornell, "The Ethical Affirmation of Human Rights," in *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 100-113.

19) John Beverley, *Subalternity and Representation: Arguments in Cultural Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 1.

20) Ibid.

21) Ranajit Guha, *Selected Subaltern Studies,* ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 35.

the history of interpretation of this passage as have the other minor characters (the four lepers and the king's servant) in this story. Scholars have examined the text revolving around the prophet and pointed out that this unit is the concluding episode of the Elisha narratives and that it demonstrates the inadequacy of the house of Omri. According to Marvin A. Sweeney, "This episode thereby functions as the concluding episode of a prophetic confrontation story, in which a prophet's legitimacy is confirmed against a challenge by an opponent who denies the validity of the prophet's message and dies as a result of his disbelief."[22] Volkmar Fritz also focuses on the prophet, noting that "the addition is, like the section 6:32–7:2, part of a redaction whose aim is to make the prophet the focus of the story."[23] Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor state, "Beyond stressing that the prediction of deliverance by the prophet had been fulfilled, it is the prophet's honor which is defended; punishment awaits the scoffer (cf. Deut 18:19)."[24] This is another example of reading the episode from a prophet-oriented perspective. Scholars have paid attention to the death of the king's adjutant. Like Sweeney and Cogan and Tadmor, they emphasize that the officer's death is punishment from God because of his disbelief. Iain W. Provan, noting that "the skeptical officer is trampled in the scramble to acquire goods,"[25] mentions that "he has died in a rush of judgment, a mocker of God's prophet."[26] Provan is interested in interpreting the death of the skeptical

22) Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, 314.

23) Volkmar Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings, Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 271.

24) Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1988), 84.

25) Iain W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings, New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 202.

26) Ibid.

officer as punishment.

Commentaries published in Korea have rarely shown a special interest in the people in this story. For example, Joong Ho Chong discussed positive aspects of the two minor characters: the lepers (vv. 3–11) and the king's servant (vv. 13–14), but he did not make any point about the people. Chong suggested that the lepers' struggling to save their own lives resulted in delivering the people's lives as well.[27] It means that Chong, like most commentators, regarded the people as merely the object of salvation.

Although some scholars are concerned with the people, they focus on the instrumentality of the people who trampled the king's adjutant. For instance, Keith Bodner states, "The last scene in this episode (7:17–20) recounts the fate of this officer ... the adjutant is trampled by the parade of people on their way to the food he had doubted."[28] Thus, Bodner simply is interested in the role that the people play in bringing about the death of the officer.

Of the scholars who have paid attention to the people, LaBarbera's thesis has a thread of connection with the approach used in subaltern studies. Although LaBarbera does not discuss the people in the narrative in detail, by suggesting that the story itself might have been written by peasants to satirize the ruling elite,[29] he is arguing that the narrator of the story is the common people, the peasants. According to LaBarbera, the peasants would have created the folk narrative in 2 Kings 6:8–7:20 in order to satirize the elites' failure and their inability to protect the people.[30] Richard D. Nelson also mentions that "this story offers

27) Joong Ho Chong, *A Commentary on 2 Kings* (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1995), 182.

28) Keith Bodner, *Elisha's Profile in the Book of Kings: The Double Agent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 125.

29) LaBarbera, "The Man of War," 651.

the perspective of history's common folk who suffer below the walls upon which kings walk, who are robbed of their basic humanity by the economic dislocations of war, for whom even donkeys' heads are out of reach."[31] He points out the connection between the messages derived by this story and those of liberation theology. In addition, Nelson affirms that "this is revolution through a holy war fought by God alone."[32] However, he does not delve into the aspect of revolution in more detail from a sociological perspective; instead, he uses theological terms and expresses reservations in his discussion concerning revolution. He notes, "The common folks' trampling of their oppressors is only a by-product of the distribution of God's good gifts but is also an inevitable result of official disbelief."[33]

Paul R. House highlights the image of an angry and hungry mob by referring to the crowd as "the hungry mob that pours out of the city gate."[34] Most scholars use a neutral term, "the people" or "the crowd," which gives an impression of the crowd merely making an appearance for a certain purpose, which is to trample the adjutant to death. In addition, through his use of the term "hungry mob," House implies that the death of the adjutant is not just an accident but is also the result of the explosion of the people's suppressed rage. Similarly, Walter Brueggemann uses adjectives and phrases—such as "astonished," "desperate," "starved," "the frantic crowd," and "the flow of people is not about to be controlled"[35]—in his description of the people, and he tries to deeply understand the circumstances

30) Ibid.
31) Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, 191.
32) Ibid.
33) Ibid.
34) Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 281.
35) Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth Helwys, 2000), 360.

that the people faced.

Following the insights offered by these scholars, this study suggests a close reading of the people from the perspective of subaltern biblical hermeneutics. Subaltern biblical interpretation spotlights the minor (subaltern) characters and tries to hear their side of the story. In this way, readers can hear the voices of the nameless silent characters and can gain meaningful insights from them. Subaltern biblical interpretation helps us to consider the people surrounding us as important and encourages us to recognize that every individual deserves attention.

2.2. The Plot of 2 Kings 7

There was a famine in Samaria which was under Arameans' siege. The four lepers, sitting outside the gate, decide to defect to the Arameans (2 Kings 7:4). At twilight, when they reach the edge of the Aramean camp, they find nothing there (v.5). Then, they apprise the king of Samaria of their discovery (v.9). Hearing the news, the king summons his servants, and speaks about the Aramean army's military strategy. One of his servants suggests sending spies to scout out the situation (v.13). Following the advice of the king's servant, the king (Jehoram) sends horses and chariots in order to spy on the empty Aramean camp (v.14). The delegation finds the road littered with garments and equipment that the Aramean army left behind (v.15). As they report this to the king, the scene unfolds as the people abruptly come out of the city and plunder the abandoned Aramean camp. Coincidentally, the prices of flour and barley return to normal (v.16). Then the king's aide who was put in charge of the gate is trampled to death by the people (v.17). Following this concluding scene, in verses 18–20 the narrator adds comments on the recovery of the grain prices and the death of the king's

adjutant. These are the fulfillment of the prophet's words foretold in the beginning of this episode (vv.1–2). Verses 18–20 function as an inclusio that reminds the reader of the prophetic message. It appears that the narrator aims to explain and emphasize the reason for the death of the king's adjutant. The narrator concludes the story by emphasizing that "the people trampled him to death in the gate" (v.20).

2.3. The Sociohistorical Research on How the People Become Subalterns

In order to focus on the elucidation of the people as subalterns, it is necessary to rethink the definition of the term 'subaltern.' We tend to identify this term with the lowest of the low in a society. By so doing, we might unconsciously go along with the principle of exclusion, which is "the breeding grounds of injustice,"[36] and as a result cause the social category of the subaltern to exist. However, it is possible to understand the citizens of Samaria, here referred to as "the people," as subalterns in that they are subordinate to the king, like the king's servant in verses 13-15. The introduction of a monarchy to ancient Israel would bring about the enslavement of the people (1 Samuel 8:10–18). Indeed, the advent of monarchy caused the phenomenon of the stratification of society in which the majority of the people gradually became slaves who were exploited by a small ruling elite group.

Judith A. Todd offers an in-depth socioeconomic explanation of how the status of the majority of the people in ancient Israel during the Omride dynasty became subalterns. According to

36) Felix Wilfred, *Asian Public Theology: Critical Concerns in Challenging Times* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2010), 4.

Todd, "The economy of the Omride dynasty fits into a typical 'advanced agrarian' model and the political and economic policies of the rulers (Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, and Joram) supported a social stratification that increased the asymmetrical structural relationship between those who produced a surplus from the land (the peasantry) and those who controlled the use of that surplus (the elite)."[37]

Todd describes how the peasantry was degraded to the status of subalterns in relation to the rulers during the Omride dynasty. Before the institution of kingship appeared in ancient Israel's society, according to Norman K. Gottwald, "the social and political relations in Israel determining what was to be produced and how it was to be distributed and consumed were egalitarian… The wider social units (protective associations of families, various cross-cutting associations, tribes and the confederacy of tribes) secured the autonomy of the many family productive-consumptive units."[38] However, when Solomon ruled, the traditional Yahwistic egalitarian orientation was under pressure and Israelite society was reshaped into a more typical advanced agrarian stratification model.[39] Omri adhered to policies in the political, socioeconomic, and religious dimensions that paralleled Solomon's.[40]

Todd notes, "Within a typical centralized agrarian society, the main economic base is the land, organized through land tenure systems that are mostly controlled by urban land holders and worked by the peasantry."[41] She goes on to say that "Urban

37) Judith A. Todd, "The Pre-Deuteronomistic Elijah Cycle," in *Elijah and Elisha in Socioliterary Perspective*, ed. Robert B. Coote (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), 3.

38) Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 464.

39) Todd, "The Pre-Deuteronomistic Elijah Cycle," 4.

40) Ibid.

41) Ibid., 5.

economy depends upon the rural economy through its ability to produce a surplus that can support the urban population."[42] However, when it comes to rights to the land, she elucidates that the peasantry is always at the base of a pyramid-shaped organizational structure.[43] The traditional tenure system took the form of a land allotment system. However, under the economic policies of the Omrides, the traditional tenure system was unable to withstand the push to gain more real estate for the landed gentry.[44] Moreover, the governing class that controlled the land dominated the peasantry through a system of rent capitalism. When pressures became overwhelming, the peasant was forced off the land.[45] Regarding the socioeconomic context of the Omrides, Todd argues that the most serious factor that caused the peasant dislocation was as follows:

> Crown land acquisition would have increased latifundialization whereby the previous landed peasant would have become a landless day-laborer ... This, then, would have increased the flight of people into cities where they formed a class of unskilled laborers on the fringes of the society. These factors promoted the shift in balance of wealth from the country into the city, where mercantile and commercial interests predominated ... This process increased the incidence of interest-bearing loans which then led into debt-slavery.[46]

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42) Ibid.

43) Ibid.

44) Ibid., 6.

45) Ibid., 7.

46) Ibid., 8. See D. N. Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets: A Social Analysis* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 20-24. According to Premnath, "Latifundialization (derived from the term latifundia, meaning large estates) can be generally defined as the process of land accumulation in the hands of a few wealthy elite to the deprivation of the peasantry" (p. 1). As a result of latifundialization, "The small plots of land to which the common peasants have access for residence and cultivation of staples are taken over by the landed elite"

Therefore, as Todd points out, we find several stories focusing on the practical concerns of a marginal community for food, shelter, tools, and healing in the Elijah-Elisha stories.[47] In particular, two stories about widows reveal that common people's lives were left destitute during the Omride dynasty. In the story of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8–24), we are told that she plans to die with her son after making a last meal (v.12). Such a speech implies that the impoverished situation of residents in the city were not too different from that of the lepers expelled from the city in 2 Kings 7:1–10. Also, in the story of a widow whose husband was one of the sons of the prophets (2 Kings 4:1–7), the widow says that a creditor has come to take her two children as slaves (v.1). This illustrates that debt-slavery seriously affected the lives of ordinary people. Moreover, as Todd articulates, the Naboth incident in 1 Kings 21 shows how crown land acquisition put wealthy people, the landholders, in jeopardy. In the story, Todd states, Naboth was one of the landholders that formed the upper class in Jezreel.[48] However, Naboth became a victim of judicial murder and forfeited his land. This clearly discloses that even people of the upper class were positioned as subalterns to the king. Also, the Shunammite woman, who is called an *'iššâ gĕdôlâ* in 2 Kings 4, was an upper-class woman. However, as Todd notes, compared with the queen Jezebel, "because of her Israelite birth, the Shunammite woman would have remained an outsider and lived with inconsistent status, wealth but no power."[49] In other words, although the Shunammite woman had considerable wealth, because she had no political power under the Omride dynasty, she was a subordinate to the queen. Hence, her declaration,

(p. 20).

47) Ibid.

48) Ibid.

49) Ibid., 9.

"I live among my own people" (v.13) has a significant resonance that can be interpreted as pointing to her status as a subaltern.

The fact that members of the upper class were subalterns to the king is indicated by the story in 2 Kings 15 of the annalistic record concerning Menahem. When King Pul of Assyria (Tiglath-Pileser III) invaded the land, Menahem, the king of Israel, paid tribute to him. 2 Kings 15:20 relates: "Menahem exacted the money from Israel, that is, from all the wealthy, fifty shekels of silver from each one, to give to the king of Assyria." This indicates that the wealthy were subordinate to the king.

2.4. The Horrible Circumstances the People Face During War

In the literary sense, as mentioned earlier, the people in 2 Kings 7:16–20 have never been deemed to be main characters. The concluding episode of the story of 2 Kings 7:3–20 can be categorized as a "denouement" in terms of the quinary scheme.[50] This unit provides the resolution of the ongoing problem in the story. As Nelson articulates, verse 16 is the climax that has been delayed by complications, including "the king's suspicions, the plan to discover the truth, and the scouting party's discovery and report (vv.12–15)."[51] He goes on to say that "both the main plot (siege) and the subplot (Elisha's oracle) come to a climax with verse 16. Then verses 17–20 report the further consequences of this climax."[52] Although the people appear at this climax, most scholars have reduced the people merely to background figures. However, paying attention to these nameless,

50) See Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Criticism* (London: SCM Press, 1999), 43.

51) Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, 191.

52) Ibid.

silent, but important multitudes that make up the story world leads us to tune into another story that is rarely heard but is embedded in the text.

The people appearing in 2 Kings 7:16–20 are mentioned in the speech of the king's officer, who notes "the fate of the whole multitude of Israel that have perished already" (v.13). From this verse, it may be inferred that the people are in a horrific, destitute situation, at the brink of ruin. We are not told how long they had been in the besieged city. However, it is clear that they have undergone a horrible situation caused by war and siege for quite a long time.

Jeffrey R. Zorn argues that warfare had a direct and determinant impact on the condition of the civilian populations in Israel and southern Levant in the first millennium BC. He surveys the evidence for the consequences of war, such as "massacre of civilian populations, forced labor or slavery and economic devastation and other practices as documented in texts, archaeological materials, and in artistic depictions."[53] According to Zorn, the result of an attack on a town was not just the destruction of its civil and private infrastructure but also the reduction in available food resources, which would have worsened the effects of any famine caused by the siege itself.[54] He states that "many civilians could also die from conditions concurrent with a siege, including combat, famine and disease,"[55] not to mention civilian deaths that occurred while the people were defending their settlement.[56] In addition, he points out that

53) Jeffrey R. Zorn, "War and Its Effects on Civilians in Ancient Israel and Its Neighbors," in *The Other Face of the Battle: The Impact of War on Civilians in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Davide Nadali and Jordi Vidal (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 79.

54) Ibid., 81.

55) Ibid., 82.

56) Ibid.

cannibalism was one of the most horrific aspects of famine, and it resulted from the severe depletion of the food reserves caused by the sudden increase in a settlement's population during a siege.[57] The appalling story of two cannibal mothers[58] in 2 Kings 6:24–33 portrays a dreadful incident during a siege. No other stories depict the situation of the people in the besieged city as gruesomely as this incident.

More importantly, Zorn notes the dangers of illness during sieges. His elucidation of the proliferation of illnesses and infections merits direct quotation:

> The crowding associated with a siege led to unhygienic conditions which, along with malnutrition brought on by diminished access to food and an often limited water supply, fostered the outbreak of disease. The inability of those trapped in a settlement to properly bury the corpses of those who died during a siege no doubt exacerbated such conditions.[59]

Furthermore, he goes on to say that "[c]ivilians and prisoners of war could face execution, or barbaric forms of punishment and torture, during and after a battle or war ... Forced labor was a common fate for those captured during war. Female civilians faced the likely horror of rape."[60] Indeed, the civilian population suffered an extremely dangerous and awful situation during war. Jordi Vidal also reveals that war was not limited to the battlefield itself but could directly affect the non-combatant population.[61]

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57) Ibid., 83.

58) See Gina Hens-Piazza, "Forms of Violence and the Violence of Forms: Two Cannibal Mothers before a King (2 Kings 6:24-33)," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 14:2 (1998), 91-104.

59) Zorn, "War and Its Effects," 83.

60) Ibid., 85-87.

61) Jordi Vidal, "Violence against Non-Combatant Population in the Levant in the Late Bronze Age," in *The Other Face of the Battle: The Impact of War on Civilians in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Davide Nadali and Jordi Vidal (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag,

Vidal argues that the lethal violence against the civilian population in the Levant during the Late Bronze Age was exercised in order to gain economic benefits.[62] The episode of 1 Kings 20 reveals that the war was triggered by economic motivations. In the story, we are told that Ben-hadad, sending his servants, demands the right to loot the palace and the houses of Ahab's servants (vv.5–6). Fritz points out, "The purpose of the looting of a city was to take as much booty as possible. This booty included the inhabitants, who were either sold as slaves or became part of the now increased property of the victor."[63] Clearly, ordinary people, including both combatants and non-combatants, functioned as tribute and were easily treated as an economic resource when they were defeated by a hostile country.

Moreover, Micaiah's speech in 1 Kings 22:17 also indicates the vulnerability of the people during war. Micaiah relates a vision in which he saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep that have no shepherd. Gina Hens-Piazza states, "Drawing upon the image of sheep without a shepherd, he sketches a scene of a people vulnerable and unprotected. They have no king."[64] Focusing on the phrase "all Israel scattered," it may be inferred that people ran the risk of being scattered to neighboring regions when they were fleeing an active war zone.[65]

Being aware of the horrific atrocities that war caused, the citizens of Samaria were presumably frightened and terrified by the circumstances they were facing during the siege. One could imagine that threatened by death, the survival instinct turns

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2014), 65.

62) Ibid., 74.

63) Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings*, 205.

64) Gina Hens-Piazza, *1-2 Kings*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 217.

65) Zorn, "War and Its Effects," 89.

the people into a mob when they found the empty Aramean camp and plundered it. Undeniably, they were about to climb over the wall. In verse 16, the scattered people give the impression of an abrupt explosion, as when a rush of water bursts all at once from behind a dam. The people here appear suddenly in order to fulfill the prophet's word, which is the death of the king's adjutant. As commentators' indifference to the people implies, the people are understood as functioning as a device to advance the plot. This completely ignores their extreme plight as illustrated by the immediately preceding episode of the cannibal mothers (6:24-33).

2.5. The People both as Subalterns and a Subaltern Character

In a similar vein, it is relevant to discuss the people in the story of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:21–40). To briefly summarize the story, Elijah scolds all the people sternly, asking them to choose either the LORD or Baal (v.21). Then, Elijah proposes a test, confronting the prophets of Baal (vv.23–25). Elijah wins the contest, which leads the people to claim the LORD as their God. In the end, Elijah orders the people to seize the Baal prophets. The people here serve as the background of the story. As the audience that witnesses Elijah's victory, they are reduced to a single role, which is to elevate Elijah. Although they show a dramatic change from a noncommittal attitude to repentance, this change also serves to highlight the power of Elijah and his deity. Moreover, the people are indeed subordinate characters in the plot. In verses 34 and 40, the people do as Elijah orders when he prepares for the contest and tries to slaughter the Baal prophets. In the end, they are expelled from the story as soon as their function has been fulfilled.

As mentioned above, a close reading of the people appearing in the Elijah-Elisha narratives discloses that the people are barely visible and often not even heard. They are defined in light of their function. As Woloch articulates, "[T]he functionalization of minor characters effaces 'the definite manifestations of definite qualities of individuals."[66] Their performing a function for someone else obliterates the particularities of each individual who makes up the multitude. However, as in the case of the Shunammite woman or of the widow at Zarephath, heterogeneity is found among the whole multitude of Israel in terms of social and economic status. The Shunammite woman and Naboth belong to the upper class. Relatively speaking, the widow of Zarephath and the widow whose two children were almost sold as debt slaves belong to the lower class. It is undeniable that there is a difference between these two groups. However, to the rulers of the Omride dynasty, they are subordinates regardless of how much wealth they possess.

Despite the heterogeneity of the people who comprise this subaltern group, it is possible to regard them as one political group so that we can identify them as forming a powerful opposition to a few elites who monopolize the resources and interests in the society. Guha defines subaltern groups as the people who are subject to the activity of the ruling elites.[67] Exactly how the people in the concluding unit of this episode can be understood as subalterns will be discussed based on Guha's concept of subalterns. He argues the common people as the subject of history and as agents of social transformation.

First, the people plunder the deserted Aramean camp, as the lepers did. Guha suggests that pillage is one of the central modalities of peasant violence.[68] Guha states that this form

66) Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*, 27.
67) Guha, *Selected Subaltern Studies*, 35.
68) Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham,

of violence by the peasantry functions to undermine the authority of the ruling elites and to eliminate the subalternity imposed on the people,[69] but this idea may not accurately correspond to the situation of the people in the narrative. However, it is clear that the people are trying to conquer the poverty and destitution that has made them into subalterns during the siege. Thus, the people's plundering can be interpreted as a symbol of their attempt to resolve their negative situation.

After the people's plundering, grain prices return to normal. The narrator adds to the story the brief comment, "according to the word of God." This implies that it is the people who made the word of God come true. What God really wanted was to liberate the people from famine so they could live. Thus, it is inferred that God is the one who wants the subalterns to overcome their poverty and destitution. From this verse, it appears that God supports the subalterns' ultimate struggle to find a way to be delivered from poverty and to achieve human dignity. However, the people's role in contributing to the normalization of market prices has not been sufficiently emphasized. Roger S. Nam, in his dissertation about economic exchanges in the book of Kings, deals with the episode of 2 Kings 7. According to Nam, "The listing of prices occurs frequently in Semitic inscriptions as a symbol of economic well-being."[70] After giving several examples of royal inscriptions showing favorable economic conditions, he goes on to say that "these 'ideal price' texts serve as royal propaganda, emphasizing the power and greatness of the monarch in setting prices."[71] He argues that unlike other ancient Near Eastern examples, "2

NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 151.

69) Ibid., 135.

70) Roger S. Nam, *Portrayals of Economic Exchange in the Book of Kings* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 168.

71) Ibid., 169.

Kings 7 deliberately does not mention any administrative action nor decree to bring the prices down."[72] He adds that "price decisions do not occur in the royal house, but only at the gate, through the bargaining of an aggregate of buyers and sellers."[73] Although he mentions that price decisions occur at the gate through bargaining, he does not highlight the role of the people in returning the inflated prices to normal. Rather, as most scholars do, he is more concerned with the Deuteronomistic Historian's intention that underlies his portrayal of the feebleness of the king.

In contrast to Nam's historical critical approach described above, subaltern studies helps us draw attention to 'the other domain' treated in the dominant discourse as of no importance or even as altogether nonexistent.[74] Pointing out that "historical scholarship has developed a tradition that tends to ignore the small drama and fine detail of social existence,"[75] Guha argues that "[a] critical historiography can make up for this lacuna by bending closer to the ground in order to pick up the traces of a subaltern life in its passage through time."[76] With this perspective in mind, it is possible to verify that the real agent of God in the story is the people, not the king nor the prophet.

In verse 17, it is told that the king had appointed the captain on whose arm he leaned to have charge of the gate, and then it is stated that the people trampled the officer to death in the gateway. The captain's death is generally understood as an accident. However, it is possible to interpret it differently. The Hebrew verb רָמַס (*rāmas*), which means "tread or trample,"

72) Ibid., 170.
73) Ibid.
74) Ranajit Guha, *A Subaltern Studies Reader 1986-1995* (Minneapolis, MN:University of Minnesota Press, 1997), xvi.
75) Ibid., 36.
76) Ibid.

that is used in v.17 usually appears in the prophetic literature in the context of judgment oracles.[77] In narratives, the occurrences of *rāmas* describe the fulfillment of a prophetic threat. Indeed, the term *rāmas* itself contains threatening overtones.[78] The narrator probably intended to highlight the death of the king's adjutant as the fulfillment of a prophetic judgment by using this verb. However, focusing on the object of judgment could result in neglecting the subject of the punishment. Shifting the focus from the object of the punishment to its subject leads us to think about why the people punished the king's adjutant.

2.6. The People as Game-changer and Divine Agent

As discussed earlier, during the Omride dynasty, the people were forced off the land and were being driven to despair and potential violence by latifundialization, warfare, and drought. As in the case of Naboth, even the wealthy were deprived of their lands and their lives under the Omrides' tyranny and exploitation. Moreover, as mentioned in 2 Kings 6:25, the famine that resulted from the ongoing siege became so great that the prices of barely edible food such as a donkey's head and dove's dung skyrocketed. Carlo Zaccagnini, noting the evidence of Near Eastern practices of pledging and selling off family real estate and members of the family,[79] argues,

> The explicit mention of war and other unexpected emergencies that caused general distress and forced people to sell relatives and real estate in order to pay their debts should not be viewed as an abnormal and temporary deviation of the

77) Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, s. v. "רָמַס *rāmas*"
78) Ibid.
79) Carlo Zaccagnini, "War and Famine at Emar," *Orientalia* 64:2 (1995), 92.

> usual state of well-being but rather as a dramatic, albeit recurrent, worsening of endemic conditions of poverty and need.[80]

Indeed, this complete destitution was a daily reality of the common people. Then, how much worse would their situation have been during a time of war and siege? Davide Nadali describes this extreme situation as follows: "When hungry and thirsty, human beings reach their most tragic and brutal with parents selling their children because of the absence of food or the high price of grain, or even killing and eating them."[81] Taking into account the severity of the siege that the people had to endure, we can get a glimpse of how desperate they would have become while they were under the siege.

As mentioned earlier, the account of the two cannibal mothers is the most vivid example describing the extreme suffering of the residents during the siege. According to Hens-Piazza, "Cannibalism or its absence appears not to be the direct consequences of scarcity of food but is specifically associated with the prevailing ethos of a society."[82] She goes on to say, "Where accommodation and harmony are subordinate to or replaced by domination and control, cannibalism may constitute a response to famine."[83] In other words, the people in Samaria were "oppressed by controlling hierarchical forces in threatening circumstances."[84] Thus, against this background, one could imagine that the trampling of the king's adjutant could have

80) Ibid., 93.

81) Davide Nadali, "The Impact of War on Civilians in the Neo-Assyrian Period," in *The Other Face of the Battle: The Impact of War on Civilians in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Davide Nadali and Jordi Vidal (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 104.

82) Hens-Piazza, "Forms of Violence," 97.

83) Ibid.

84) Ibid.

resulted from a spontaneous explosion of the people's repressed anger and resentment. In her book *On Violence*, Hannah Arendt offers a significant insight with respect to such violence. She says:

> Violence is neither beastly nor irrational. That violence often springs from rage is a commonplace, and rage can indeed be irrational and pathological, but so can every other human affect. It is no doubt possible to create conditions under which men are dehumanized—such as concentration camps, torture, famine, etc.—but this does not mean that they become animal-like; and, under such conditions, not rage and violence but their conspicuous absence is the clearest sign of dehumanization.[85]

She goes on to say, "Only where there is reason to suspect that conditions could be changed and are not does rage arise. Only when our sense of justice is offended do we react with rage."[86] Hence, if it is right to assume that the people were angry, their rage demonstrates that they acknowledged they were in an unjust situation and that they had the will to change their circumstances.

In a similar vein, Francis Gonsalves states, "When groups are consciously or unconsciously treated as unequal and inferior, the result is exclusion, isolation or even aggression and violence."[87] As Gonsalves articulates, when people can no longer endure being treated as unequal and inferior, they cannot help using violence. Thus, their committing violence has political significance. Arendt argues, "What makes man a political being is his faculty of action; it enables him to get together with his peers, to act in concert,

85) Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), 63.

86) Ibid.

87) Francis Gonsalves, *God of Our Soil: Towards Subaltern Trinitarian Theology* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2010), 100-101.

and to reach out for goals and enterprise."[88] Thus, the people in 2 Kings 7 qualify as political beings since they gathered together for one goal, to bring about the death of the king's adjutant. Indeed, the death of the captain in this unit can be interpreted as resistance to statist ideology.[89] Given that the captain represents the Omride dynasty and that he was trying to control the people, murdering the captain is deemed an attack on the statist power. Hence, the people's action can be regarded as revolution from below. Although the people in the narrative are a broadly based group of people that includes more than just disadvantaged groups, it is plausible to view the people's killing the captain as resistance to statist ideology in that statism justifies oppressive policies designed to strengthen the subordination of the people to the state.

Here, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between the subalterns and the nation or state. According to Beverley, "In subaltern studies, the subaltern is conceptualized as that which is not only outside the state, but also constitutively opposed to the state in some sense or other."[90] However, Beverley suggests an alternative perspective on the subaltern and his or her political agency, quoting Saskia Sassen as follows: "The multiplying of informal political subjects points to the possibility that the excluded also can make history, thereby signaling the complexity of powerlessness."[91] In addition, in contrast to Spivak's idea

88) Arendt, On Violence, 82.

89) The term 'statism' has two meanings: (1) a belief in the sovereignty of individual states, and (2) oppressive policies on the part of a government that crushes civil liberties and increases the social and economic powers of the state. Statism in this sense was one of the major tenets of fascist Italy and Germany – individuals existed to serve the state. The Dictionary of 20th-Century World Politics, s.v. "statism."

90) John Beverley, Latinamericanism after 9/11 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 111.

91) Ibid., 115.

of the subaltern as being outside of (or below) the hegemony, he offers an insightful comment on García Linera's idea of the subaltern:

> For García Linera, the very logic of the demands of the social movements or popular groupings leads them necessarily to pose the question of a radical transformation of the dominant state form. Whether those demands take an electoral or an insurrectionary form, they must create a new form of hegemony. The subaltern can not only speak, it can and should govern.[92]

Furthermore, according to Beverley, "García Linera argues for a new form of politics directed at becoming the state that in some sense comes from the subaltern, but also involves the participation of intellectuals and theory."[93] Beverley goes on to say that "[h]e moves away from the simple binary opposition between the state and the subaltern, to presuppose that hegemony not only can be but needs to be constructed from subaltern positions."[94] Linera's articulation of the subaltern as becoming the hegemony seems a hyperbolic and unattainable ideal. However, his ambitious conception of the subaltern as the subject of the state leads us to be careful not to undermine the power that the subaltern has.

Moreover, Beverley states that "subaltern studies has been understood as involving centrally an investigation and a critique of the nation-state ... subaltern studies allows us to reimagine the nation."[95] As the research of the subaltern studies accumulates, the concept of subalterns as subjects of history and as a dynamic political agency has become increasingly important,

92) Ibid., 120.
93) Ibid.
94) Ibid.
95) Beverley, *Subalternity*, 23.

and this calls on us to expand the power of the subalterns in solidarity with them. Willingness to be in solidarity and to have a sense of community is another crucial aspect of subalterns. The community of subalterns is based on solidarity, mutuality, and reciprocity. These values are significant in the definition of subalterns because, as Wilfred emphasizes, subalterns eventually pursue the building of a just and egalitarian society.[96] In order for the subalterns' dream to come true or "for subaltern communities to survive and grow as community," Gonsalves states, "it is vital that they are located in the public sphere as political communities."[97] For this task, those who can represent the voiceless and hidden subalterns are needed. Gonsalves goes on to say that "the power of subaltern communities comes from their solidarity and numerical strength in rallying for their rights ... Thus, it is to the advantage of disadvantaged communities to work for their recognition as 'political community' by the state and its functionaries."[98] As Gonsalves points out, numerical strength is important to strengthen the power of subaltern communities. It is important because, as Arendt notes, "Power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert."[99] In the 2 Kings 7 narrative, we can imagine that when numerous people came out of the gate all at once, this would have threatened the ruling elite. If a gathering of numerous people reflects the desire for a new society that is characterized by a more democratic and nonhierarchical social order, the presence of numerous people at the conclusion of 2 Kings 7 indicates that a revolution for a new world has been initiated.

96) Wilfred, *Asian Public Theology*, xxiv.
97) Gonsalves, *God of Our Soils*, 104.
98) Ibid.
99) Arendt, *On Violence*, 52.

Conclusion

In conclusion, from the story of the people in 2 Kings 7:16–20, it is clear that without the people's appearance on the scene, the famine in Samaria would not have ended and grain prices would not have returned to normal. Within the entire context of the story, it is found that the four lepers' reporting about the empty Aramean camp to the gatekeepers and the king's servant's giving advice to the king play crucial roles in overcoming the disastrous national crisis. If the story ended there, the people would have been the passive object of salvation. However, the people's action made the story complete. Hence, the concluding scene of the story in 2 Kings 7 demonstrates that the subalterns are the makers of their own history and the architects of their own destiny. Also, the story of the people in 2 Kings 7 offers the political implication that a radical change in the direction of a just and egalitarian society is within the power of the people.

<주제어>

열왕기하 7장, 백성, 마이너 캐릭터, 조연 연구, 사회-문학적 읽기

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<초록>

서발턴 캐릭터(subaltern character)로서의 '백성'

-열왕기하 7장을 중심으로-

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이 논문은 열왕기하 7장, 사마리아의 포위 상태를 끝내는 데 결정적인 역할을 하였지만 본문의 해석의 역사에서 주목받지 못했던 등장인물인 백성들, 즉 사마리아 시민들에 대한 문학적, 사회학적 자세한 읽기를 시도한다. 열왕기하 7장 본문은 아람군에 포위되어 오래된 기근으로 백성들이 자식을 삶아먹는 처참한 상황에서 백성들을 보호하는 데 실패한 오므리 왕조에 대한 비판으로 읽혀왔다. 학자들은 주로 여호람왕과 예언자 엘리사 사이의 갈등 상황이나 여호람왕의 무능력에 대한 비판, 그리고 이야기 말미에 예언자 엘리사의 예언을 믿지 못한 왕의 군대장관의 죽음 등의 주제에 주목해왔다. 이 논문은 기존의 학문적 관심의 대상에서 제외되었던 혹은 간과되었던 등장인물들인 백성들과 그들과 관련된 이슈들에 시선을 옮겨 보았다. 문학비평가 알렉스 월록은 일부 등장인물들에게 제한된 주목만이 주어진다는 사실을 토대로, 중심부에 위치한 주인공을 위해 주변부에서 부차적, 기능적, 파편적으로 존재하는 수많은 조연들(minor characters)의 특징들에 주목한다. 갑작스러운 등장과 사라짐이 바로 그 특징들로서, 이것은 조연들이 주인공들에게 종속된 존재로 줄거리를 진행시키기 위한 도구적인 용도를 갖는 존재로 설정되어 있기 때문이다. "종속"이라는 특징을 한 마디로 함축하는 개념으로 안토니오 그람시, 라나지트 구하, 가야트리 스피박과 같은 학자들에 의해 널리 사용된 서발턴(subaltern)이라는 표현은 월록이 지적한 조연들을 설명하기에 적합하다. 이 공통점을 바탕으로, 본 논문은 열왕기하 7장의 이야기

끝에 등장하며 대사 한마디 없이 사라지는 등장인물, 백성들을 서발턴 캐릭터로 지칭하고, 서발턴 연구와 조연에 대한 문학적 연구의 빛 아래에서 분석하고자 한다. 이 논문은 사마리아 기근을 종료시키고 물가 안정을 가져온 이 사마리아 백성들은 전체 이야기를 완성시킨 필수불가결한 등장인물들이라는 점에서 한 사회의 바람직한 변혁의 움직임은 수많은 서발턴들로부터 시작된다는 점을 강조한다.

<Abstract>

Reading the People as a Subaltern Character in 2 Kings 7

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The present paper aims to conduct a close reading of the people in 2 Kings 7. The people, the citizens of Samaria, play a crucial role in ending the siege in the narrative. However, they have not received enough attention throughout the history of interpretation. Scholars have paid attention to themes such as the failure of the Omri dynasty in protecting the people in the midst of national crisis, conflict between the king (Jehoram) and the prophet (Elisha), and the death of the king's adjutant as a result of his disbelief. This study attempts to shift the attention from the major figures such as the king and the prophet to the minor ones, the people, who have been neglected and excluded in the field of academic research. Alex Woloch, a literary theorist, with an awareness of the limited attention paid to some characters, notes features of minor characters on the periphery that exist revolving around the protagonist in the center. It is a sudden appearance and disappearance that characterizes the minor characters. This is inevitable because the minor figures are reduced to a single functional device to develop a plot. In other words, the minor characters are subordinate to the major ones. The term, "subaltern," that is used and developed by Antonio Gramsci, Ranajit Guha, and Gayatri Spivak, connotes an attribute of subordination. In this sense, it is appropriate to designate minor characters as subaltern characters. On the basis of the commonalities between minor characters in literary

studies and subaltern in subaltern studies, this project refers to the people, minor characters, as subaltern characters, and analyzes them in light of the socio-literary methods. This study argues that the people are significant in the narrative and that they are letigimate subjects of history and agents of social transformation.