IMAGINED WORLDS AND CONSTRUCTED DIFFERENCES IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Edited by
Jeremiah W. Cataldo
CONTENTS

Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION
Jeremiah W. Cataldo 1

Chapter 2
SOCIAL SCIENCES MODELS AND MNEMONIC/IMAGINED WORLDS:
EXPLORING THEIR INTERRELATIONS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL
Ehud Ben Zvi 9

Chapter 3
THE ASSASSINATION OF AMON AND THE CRISIS OF ASSYRIAN
IMPERIALISM
Bradley L. Crowell 27

Chapter 4
NEHEMIAH'S SOCIOECONOMIC REFORM: PRINCIPLES AND
ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Kyong-jin Lee 43

Chapter 5
VEILED RESISTANCE: THE COGNITIVE DISSONANCE OF VISION
IN GENESIS 38
Carolyn Alsen 59

Chapter 6
THOSE AT EASE HAVE CONTEMPT FOR MISFORTUNE: BIBLICAL
APPROACHES TO CHALLENGING ANTI-POOR SENTIMENT
Matthew J. M. Coomber 83

Chapter 7
A TASTE FOR WISDOM: AESTHETICS, MORAL DISCERNMENT, AND
SOCIAL CLASS IN PROVERBS
Mark Sneed 111
Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION
Jeremiah W. Cataldo

Where are we going?

It is a troublesome thing that the role constructed, cultural memory has played in the formation of the biblical texts remains an under-explored area of academic inquiry. True of both the past and the present, the ways in which groups imagine the world as they believe it should be and the ways in which they construct identities and boundaries of difference in response to that imagining are important indicators of ideological, and frequently specifically political, intentions. In that vein, with respect to the Hebrew Bible, descriptions of a new "Israel," of a restored nation and its monarchy, are nearly all utopian—projected desires for a stabilized sociopolitical community. In such contexts, the ways in which the distinction between member and nonmember are articulated are products of an imagined world, or community, in which the desired order reflects the deeply rooted values and desires of the community—that is core to how restoration as a biblical concept has been interpreted by more modern readers.1 The distinction between member and nonmember gets measured out in spheres of politics, economics, and society (for instance, in the issue of gender relations) to the point that insiders are considered safe and outsiders threatening. To imagine a community, as Benedict Anderson described in his work Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, is to orient, through narrated or acted out beliefs and behaviors, institutions, meanings, values, and relationships, toward realizing an intended sociopolitical state, one that takes on an objective quality for the community's members. While some such worlds are entirely utopian, some, if not most, are also directly grounded in real concerns and strategies. And in some cases, an imagined community may provide the basis for revolutionary action. Certainly, for those familiar with social-scientific methods, these premises are familiar. They are foundational to much theory on collective identity; they are also frequently

1. Yet one should acknowledge that the vocabulary of "restoration" overlooks the fact that the imagined result is in fact utopian.
Chapter 9

MULTINATIONALITY AND THE UTOPIAN PROJECT:
THE CASE OF ACTUALLY EXISTING ISRAEL

Roland Boer

How might the relation between utopianism and "nationalism" be understood? A more usual approach would be to suggest that utopia indicates an ideal or perfected form of collective existence, while a nation is an "imagined community" that may become the object of such a utopian ideal. A budding utopian nation in such a situation careens toward a trap with two outcomes: either it is unrealizable, since the step toward its material realization is too great, or it becomes dystopian, since the required effort to realize it betrays it by failing to live up to the initial ideal that inspired it. The seeming inevitability of this trap has produced a range of responses: impatient dismissals of any form of utopian project; the distinction between undesirable utopian projects and desirable scientific projects; the refusal to acknowledge any actual effort at constructing an alternative society in the name of a "genuine" and ideal utopian break that really changes the foundations of social existence.

Given the seeming conflation of both utopianism and nationalism in the Bible, which makes the "trap" a significant risk for modern interpreters, I undertake a different approach to these terms, with specific reference to ancient Israel. To wit, while utopia is predicated on incompleteness or imperfection, dystopia is predicated on completion and perfection. This approach challenges common assumptions concerning utopia: it is supposed to be a situation in which change is no longer...

1. As defined by Anderson, Imagined Communities.
needed, which entails closure to any further change in the material and ideological systems that define the identity of the social-political body. Such closure assumes that contradictions and tensions, if not forces of interruption and challenges to the newly stabilized status quo, as well as multiplicity, by which difference is unavoidably introduced into the system, and uncertainty in any social-political stability have all been "shut out." The catch is that any attempt to realize a utopian situation that is predicated upon such assumptions breaks down into dystopia. By contrast, I argue that utopia is actually determined by a lack of closure, an irresolvable incompleteness. It is an ongoing and uncertain process, radically incomplete and multifarious. It should be added that the utopian desire is predicated on two key features: sustained criticism of the bitter realities of contemporary societies and the construction of an imagined alternative, usually in another location from the present one.

As for the idea of a nation, I argue that it is a distinct group within a state—which should really be called a nationality—rather than a state or country (or as it is often called, a "nation state"). Or, as Anderson writes, "It is an imagined political community ... imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members." But members are bound by their shared commitment to a greater ideal. This means that any state is, on the level of identity, a multinational state. Consequently, a national utopian project depends upon an incomplete national identity, so much so that it produces a multiplication of nationalities and diversity.

Obviously, my effort to reshape the key terms requires more explanation, which I undertake in the first two parts of this study. How it relates to Israel is the concern of the third part. In a nutshell, my argument is that the narrative effort (my focus is on the texts of the Hebrew Bible) to produce a distinct and unified nationality known as "Israel" opens the possibility of a multiplicity of nationalities. In other words, the utopian project of Israel turns out to be multiple, incomplete, and open.

Imperfect utopias

I draw the idea of an imperfect utopia from the work of Ernst Bloch and Fredric Jameson but I add a distinctive "Chinese twist." Jameson has argued consistently that the danger of utopias running aground means that we must look elsewhere for a viable theory of utopia. So he begins with a more dialectical approach, locating the possibility of utopia within dystopias of even the worst kind. His interest lies not so much in the content of dystopias as in the formal and collective effort to imagine (and we might recall Anderson here) an alternative world. And the role of collective imagination leads him to propose a multiplicity of potential utopias, each of them incomplete and open. It follows that the longevity or otherwise of a utopia is not a sign of "failure," but that the possibility they may last for shorter or longer periods is a feature of such utopias. Jameson adds that, with a nod to some form of democratic expression, one may opt out of one in favor of another. Clearly, Jameson is less interested in subjective dimensions, concerning the ideological content of such utopias or indeed the nature of their construction by human intention, and more in the objective, formal features. However, for my purpose in this chapter, I am less interested in the anarcho-syndicalist dimension of Jameson's proposal, with its multiple voluntary utopias, and more in his insistence on the incompleteness of such utopias.

As for Bloch, his simultaneous hermeneutics and philosophy of utopia draw upon the wealth of biblical, literary, and cultural references to capture glimpses of utopian desires and wishes. These remain irrepressible but unfulfilled, which the forces of reaction are unable to suppress no matter what they try. (It is worth noting that Bloch seeks to develop a notion of agency that goes well beyond human agency. It includes non-human and material agency.) Most importantly for my purposes, Bloch proposes what he calls the "non-contemporaneity" (Ungleichezeltigkeit) of the present, or the "contemporaneity of non-contemporaneity." This means that any mode of production (socioeconomic system) always contains traces of earlier modes of production, traces that exist at different levels and modalities simultaneously in the present. They function as types of economic, political, and cultural "groundwater," which lies closer to or farther from the surface, depending on the time and place. But they also challenge and resist the present, contradicting "the Now; very strangely, crookedly, from behind." Bloch's immediate interest is to account for the rise of fascism in Europe, which he analyzes in terms of its ability to construct reactionary resistance through false myths and hopes drawn from the past. But the most significant implication of his analysis concerns socialism: this non-contemporaneity also creates the possibility for socialist revolution in

---

5. Anderson, Imagined Communities, 6.
8. Anticipating Negri's constitutive resistance: "Even though common use of the term might suggest the opposite—that resistance is a response or reaction—resistance is primary with respect to power" (M. Hardt and A. Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire [New York: Penguin, 2004], 64; see also Y. Moullet, "Introduction," to A. Negri, The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century [Cambridge: Polity, 2005]), 1-44.
10. Ibid., 97.
which the unattained hopes of earlier forms link with present anticipations. More dialectically, the revolutionary impulse of the present, which emerges from class struggle and generates expectations of a "prevented future" and the unleashing of the forces of production, gains "addition revolutionary force precisely from the incomplete wealth of the past." 11 Bloch calls for a multi-temporal and multi-spatial dialectic in order to make philosophical sense of this potential, but it also indicates the distinct possibility, if not necessity, that the contradictions and tensions in question would be exacerbated in any utopian project in process. In other words, in any utopian construction, the process would become even more complicated and incomplete.

Mao Zedong's "On Contradiction" offers this discussion a unique "Chinese twist."
12 Mao draws heavily on Lenin's "Philosophical Notebooks" 13 to develop his arguments concerning the universality but also the particularity of contradiction, as well as the primary and secondary contradictions in any given situation. Further, the primary contradiction has a more important and less important pole, with the relationship changing in light of circumstances. From the weight of his argument, what I want to stress for my purpose here is the unity of contradictions. That unity, including the assumption of a possible unity itself, reveals a distinctly Chinese transformation of dialectics— as his quotation of a popular Chinese saying indicates: "xiangfan xiangcheng" (Things that oppose each other also complement each other). 14 This reality of mutual cooperation within contradictions runs deep in Chinese philosophical thought and cultural assumptions: from the mundane everyday matters of food and drink, through Lao Zi's point that what is in opposition is transformed into its opposite, to the universal principle of the interpenetration of yin and yang (from the Yi Jing and Dao De Jing). Indeed, the fabled Confucian category of datong, thoroughly reinterpreted by Kang Yuwei, assumes not an overcoming of contradictions but a situation in which they are able to exist side by side, in mutual cooperation, without being disruptive. 
15 While Mao transforms these traditional elements in light of the dominant framework of dialectical materialism, 16 I am particularly interested in the point that utopia

(by which Mao, and indeed the others, mean communism) does not entail some impossible perfection, but the continuation of contradictions, or what some would call "imperfections." Indeed, what counts as utopia is precisely these contradictions, tensions, even imperfections, rather than a completed and perfected project.

Redefining nation and nationality

Thus far I have sought to reshape the understanding of utopia, so now I seek to revise the way nation and nationality may be approached. Indeed, I prefer the terminology of "nationality," since the term "nation" is now so closely bound up with the idea of a state that it is difficult to imagine another usage. When one thinks of the "nations" of, say, Japan, Indonesia, and the Philippines, one usually calls to mind the political entities known as states or "countries." Indeed, "nation state" has become the assumed way of speaking about them, especially as an "imagined community." 17 This approach may be acceptable in the geopolitical situation of the twentieth century and later, but the terminology has its own distinct and relatively brief history. This means that it is problematic to apply this terminology to the ancient world. Any close examination of that world would show that collective political bodies were far from "nations," in the modern sense, let alone "nation states." In order to develop an alternative terminology that may be used for such a situation, I turn to debates about the particularities of such terminology that happened among socialists at the turn of the twentieth century. These debates were known as "the national question" and drew the attention of socialists in states with multiple groups—which are now erroneously called "ethnic groups"—such as Austria and Russia.

In the early twentieth century, the burgeoning European socialist movement was vexed by the issue of nationalities. Opinions tended to fall into two groups. One side was represented by Karl Kautsky, who argued in favor of class solidarity at the expense of cultural and national difference. Nations, argued Kautsky, were produced historically by economic forces, especially under capitalism and the bourgeoisie: the breaking down of territorial, cultural, and linguistic barriers led to modern nations as economic, political, and military entities with official languages. 18 Thus far, the participants in the debate agreed, but Kautsky went

14. Mao, "On Contradiction," 343. By the time Mao quotes this saying, which appears only in the revised version of the essay, it was already 1900 years old. It was first coined by Ban Gu's Hanshu (Book of Han), from the first century CE.
17. Anderson, Imagined Communities.
a step further, suggesting that socialism would continue the process, breaking
down national barriers to the point where global socialism would eventually
require a common language, albeit one that was already known rather than a new
one.20 On the other side were those who urged that national and cultural issues
were central. This side included the Austro-Marxists, Otto Bauer and Karl Renner,
(Rudolf Springer), the Bund (General Jewish Workers' Union of Lithuania,
Poland, and Russia), and branches of the Caucasian Social-Democrats (especially
the dispersed Armenians). Building on Renner's practical political proposals,
Bauer argued for a historicist culturism, in which an intangible "national culture"
was contingent upon historical and economic forces.21 Practically, this meant
a need for "cultural-national autonomy," in which cultural communities lived in
a multinational state, safe-guarded by autonomous self-administration and
democratization, but without territorial sovereignty. Crucially, ethnicity was not
regarded as a major feature of such groups—an agreement among all involved
in the debate. The Bund and some of the Caucasian Social-Democrats followed
Bauer's lead, deploying the terminology of both "national cultures" and "cultural-
national autonomy." The Bund did so with much struggle, for it was riven with
debate between the internationally minded members, who felt that any deference
to national issues was an incipient form of nationalism, and the nationally
minded, who argued that the Bund should represent Jewish workers within a
federated social democratic organization and then—after a socialist revolution—
that nationalities should have jurisdiction over cultural matters, but not political,
economic, or territorial autonomy within a federated state. The latter were
instrumental in formulating the Bund's position that the Jews form a "nation"
(fourth congress of 1901), which is entitled to "free cultural development" with
self-government (sixth congress of 1905).22

A major contributor to these debates was none other than Stalin. His early
position would become over time the basis for policies in the Soviet Union and

p?id=07.00427&doc=1887sf=1887_0392&l=1887_0405; K. Kautsky, "Nationality and
1.35 (1907 [2010]), 143-63.

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000 [1907]); see also G. Egry, "Social
Democracy and the Nationalities Question," in Regimes and Transformations: Hungary in
the Twentieth Century, eds. I. Feitl and B. Sipos (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2005), 95-118.

22. I. Frankel, Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-

indeed other socialist states throughout the world. Stalin responded to these
culturist positions in two ways that are important here.23 First, he proposed a
definition in which he relegated the cultural factor to the unimportant final
place: "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people formed
on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological
storehouse [sklada] manifested in a common culture."24 It is also worth noting that
Stalin agreed with all the other participants in the debate that ethnicity is not a
determining factor of a nationality. Second, his overriding emphasis was on unity,
whether of the social democratic movement or the state after a socialist revolution.
But how was such unity to be achieved? Not through the federalism suggested
by those advocating "national-cultural autonomy."25 Instead, Stalin argued for
class as the primary category, compared to which a "national-cultural" approach
"substitutes for the socialist principle of the class struggle the bourgeois 'principle
of nationality."

The point is not that an external category—class—determines the nature of national
identification, but that one must move dialectically: only through a focus on class as an international category can national aspirations be
reconfigured, leading to the production of regional autonomy and recognition of
dispersed minorities.

Let me take this further, focusing less on the content than the dynamic of
his argument. Unity is not to be imposed on diversity, whether through policies
of assimilation or a grudging awareness of national diversity, as some have
suggested.27 Instead, Stalin argues dialectically that unity produces hitherto

23. Culturism identifies an intangible "culture" (often laced with religious factors) as the
basis for collective identity.

24. I. V. Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," in Works (vol. 2, Moscow: Foreign
Languages Publishing House, 1913 [1953]), 307; L. V. Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi
vopros," in Sochinenia (vol. 2, Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi
literatury, 1913 [1946]), 296 (translation modified).

25. Like the anatomist, who must know the whole to understand its parts (I. V. Stalin,
"The Social-Democratic View on the National Question," in Works [vol. 1, Moscow:
Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1904 [1945]), 46-47; I. V. Stalin, "Kak ponimaet sotsial-
demokratia natsional'nyi vopros?" in Sochinenia [vol. 1, Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe
izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1904 [1946]), 47-48).

26. Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 342; Stalin, "Marksizm i natsional'nyi

25; R. Pipes, The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism. 1917-1923
50-51; T. Martin, "Modernization or Neo-Traditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet
348-67; T. Martin, "An Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of
Imperialism," in A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin,
unexpected diversity. This argument would appear in many situations, but perhaps the best example—pertinent to my analysis of Israel in the biblical texts—relates to nationalities and languages:

Until now what has happened has been that the socialist revolution has not diminished but rather increased the number of languages; for, by stirring up the lowest sections of humanity and pushing them on to the political arena, it awakens to new life a number of hitherto unknown or little-known nationalities. Who could have imagined that the old, tsarist Russia consisted of not less than fifty nations and national groups? The October Revolution, however, by breaking the old chains and bringing a number of forgotten peoples and nationalities on to the scene, gave them new life and a new development.

In summing up this debate, let me draw out the key features for the present argument. To begin with, ethnicity was not a factor regarded as central to identifying a nationality because it potentially confused matters. Instead, the main factors were history, economics, community, territory, language, and culture, with participants differing in their emphases. More significantly, the question of unity and diversity loomed large, in which diversity was produced out of a primary drive to unity. I will interpret this point as the question of utopia. One may suggest that diversity within unity is utopian, with the former valorized in light of the dystopian—"totalitarian"—threats of the latter. This would be a liberal utopia, which manifests itself in the debate as "cultural-national" diversity and which would come to form the basis of later Western European programs of multiculturalism. Or should one suggest that the unity of nationalities is the

utopian dimension, entailing all manner of assimilation programs in different parts of the world? Either option is problematic, with the constant threat of dystopian elements. Since neither option is satisfactory, I propose that the more dialectical argument offers the best approach: the way to foster diversity is precisely through an alternative and indeed totalizing unity. Or in the terminology used in my analysis of utopia: this emphasis on unity produces not a closed dystopia (in the name of utopia) but a utopian project that is ever more open, diverse, and incomplete.

It is perhaps less well known than it should be that this approach to nationalities became—through much trial and error—the basis for the Soviet Union’s affirmative action program concerning nationalities, as well as the anti-colonial drive that enabled what is now called postcolonialism. It also became the basis for similar programs in other socialist countries. Indeed, as a transition to my analysis of ancient Israel, I would like to provide a specific example from China, which—after a thorough revision in the 1990s—has taken the approach to its fifty-five minority nationalities to a level beyond that achieved in the Soviet Union, emphasizing the increased autonomy of these nationalities and the inviolability of China’s borders. The example concerns the Hui people, who were initially invited by the Tang emperors some thirteen centuries ago to come to the ancient capital of Xián, since they had a reputation for hard work and the fostering of exchange. But were they an identifiable ethnic group at the time? Not at all. As with all such groups, their history is mixed. The Tang, Song, and Yuan dynasties encouraged immigration to China of Muslim peoples from more western parts of the world, as far as Persia. A long history of intermarriage with Han people led to the development of what is now known as the Hui. But the Hui include converts to Islam among the Han, as well as other Muslim groups on Hainan island, among the Bai people and Tibetan Muslims. The key to their identification is religion, even if such identification is restricted to certain customs, dietary patterns, and dress, rather than religious practice per se. The vast majority of the Hui speak Mandarin and most of their customs are common to the Han. However, I cannot emphasize enough that the identification of the Hui as a nationality was a state


decision, made after the liberation of China and the establishment of the People's Republic. Earlier uses of Hui (dating back to the Song Dynasty a millennium ago) referred to Chinese speaking people with foreign and Muslim ancestry. But the designation, in the 1950s, as a distinct nationality has produced a strong national consciousness among the Hui. This means that the complex and overlaid history of the Hui, with migration, intermarriage, state decisions, and policies, has led to, if not produced, a strong sense of national identity within a larger state. The point is that such a process is dialectical: it is not so much a distinction between "from above" and "from below," but rather a situation in which both are entwined with one another, defining each in turn. The official identification of the Hui as a nationality would not have happened without their gradual arrival in China from different parts further west. But their self-identification as a nationality, of which they are enthusiastic, would not have happened without a distinct decision by the state, based on extensive research. I would like to emphasize this point in two respects, for the Hui are not unique. First, as with any such group, its identity is the result of a long history of movement, intermingling, and development, so much so that no such group is "pure," for what counts as such a group is really a history of intermingling with many other groups, which are themselves the result of further mingling. Second, the unified identity of the group as a distinct nationality is the result of a distinct program, whether the decision of a state and its ensuing policies, or indeed—as we will see—of a literary narrative that seeks to produce such an identity. In this light, we may redefine Anderson's notion of an imagined community as one that involves a dual process, one that moves at the intersections of above and below.

Israel: A dialectic of unity and multiplication

Now I can turn to the question of Israel, as both a nationality and as a utopian project. The utopian dimension would seem to be easy to identify via the texts: an ideal that is developed in the wilderness, following faithfully the divine laws and the form of the state delineated. The problem, of course, is that the utopian community is never realized, for the people are represented as constantly falling short of the ideal, worshipping "foreign" gods and inter-breding with "foreigners." In light of my earlier observations, this biblical image of an ideal Israel—developed particularly in the Torah—is problematic, for it leads to dystopia. In order to find an alternative approach, I will work through the question of nationality. Not only does it turn out that the nationality in question is actually quite diverse and the intersection of multiple nationalities, but the very effort to identify a distinct nationality also produces even more diversity, both within and without.

The archaeological and sociological arguments for the multifarious origins of Israel are by now reasonably well known. Let me begin with Gottwald some forty years ago, with the proposal that early Israel may well have been composed of amorphous groups such as a Levitical Moses group from Egypt, bands of irpiru, Shoshu, Rechabites/Kenites, disaffected Canaanite peasants, debtors, and outlaws, who gathered in the Judean highlands and made use of new technology, invented during the long economic "crisis" of the turn of the first millennium BCE. Since then, archaeological field surveys have confirmed that new settlements in the highlands did indeed take place during this time. But who were they? Foreigners, settled pastoral nomads, an ethnically distinct group, Canaanites, Israelites, economic refugees making the most of the absence of imperial overlords and their extractive palatine regime, people of mixed backgrounds?

The initial impression is that such a historical reconstruction is analogous with the example of the Hui (see above), at least in historical terms focused on the question of origins. But the catch with this approach is that it entails a narrative that moves from multiplicity to unity, in which the former is the initial problem and the latter is an attempt at unity. I would like to examine a different approach, which I attempted earlier in relation to the Hui: Can we identify a dialectic of unity and diversity in the way "Israel" developed? In order to answer this question, I focus on the texts. At first sight, they seem to be stitched together with an overarching narrative of uniqueness, which can be traced back to the legendary ancestors: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A more careful consideration of the text reveals a somewhat different picture, in which various nationalities turn up in the midst of what the text claims as ancient Israel. Already early in the convoluted and constructed narrative we find that Abram's father, Terah, comes from Ur of the Chaldeans, which he then leaves for Canaan with his family in tow (Gen. 11:31; Neh. 9:7), although he does not arrive, having settled and then died in Haran. When it comes time for Isaac to find an appropriate partner, it is back to "my country and my kindred" (Gen. 24:4), to which Abraham's slave is sent. Is this country Chaldean or something else? Rebekah, it will turn out, is the "daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram" (Gen. 25:19). And to keep it all in the family, Jacob-Israel himself returns to "Paddan-aram to the house


38. Daniel-Beltshazzar's identity is also unclear, suggesting that he is both Hebrew and Chaldean (Dan. 1:6-7).
of Bethuel, your mother's father" (Gen. 28:2), to seize a woman or two from the daughters of his maternal uncle, Laban (Genesis 29). Although this mythical narrative repeatedly emphasizes that the women in question were not to be seized, the embodiment of the Edomites (Gen. 25:30; 36; Num. 20:24; see also Deut. 23:7). He also marries women from among the "people of the land," the Hittites (Gen. 26:34) or indeed Canaanites (Gen. 36:1), the same land in which Sarah and then Abraham, Isaac, Leah, Rachel, and Jacob are buried (Gen. 23: 25:9-10; 49:29-50:14). Even more, the offspring of Lot (grandson of Terah and nephew of Abraham) and his daughters become the Moabites and Ammonites (Gen. 19:30-38; see also Deut. 2:19) and Judah marries an unnamed Canaanite woman (Gen. 38:2) and then has two sons, Perez and Zerah, by Tamar, his widowed daughter-in-law who also seems to be a Canaanite. Simeon too has a son by a "Canaanite woman" (Exod. 6:15), while Manasseh's unnamed Aramean concubine bears Machir the father of Gilead (1 Chron. 7:14). To add to mix, Joseph marries an Egyptian woman given to him by Pharaoh. Ashenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, who bears two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (Gen. 41:45; 50:52). Thus, the ancestors are already—as far as the text is concerned—a distinct mix of Chaldean, Aramean, Edomite, Egyptian, Moabite, Ammonite, Hittite, and Canaanite. The complexity of what counts as "Israel" only increases, but it does so precisely when a distinct identity begins to be asserted. In other words, diversity intensifies the more unity is asserted. Already in the first chapter of Exodus, this identity appears, in both the narrator's voice (Exod. 1:7) and in the mouth of the new king of Egypt (Exod. 1:8). Yet, as this distinctness becomes a narrative feature, the diversity of its leader becomes intriguingly complicated. Is Moses an Egyptian, as Exod. 2:8 suggests, with a distinctly Egyptian name (Exod. 2:1-9, 19) and marrying a Midianite, Zipporah (Exod. 2:21-22)? And who is Moses's father-in-law? Is it Reuel, the priest of Midian (Exod. 2:19) and son of Hobab (Num. 10:29), or Jethro, also a priest of Midian (Exod. 3:1; 4:18-20; 18), or Hobab the Kenite (Judg. 1:16; 4:11)? Multiple names, multiple wives, shifting identities, textual disruptions—I suggest

39. J. Skinner quaintly observes of the incident: "The habit is said to have persisted to modern times in that region" (A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis [The International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1910], 313). He seems to be referring to living in caves.

40. In this light, it is somewhat misleading to refer to Abraham and Isaac "among the nations" (T. Brodie, Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 254–64).


42. "When Moses claims the mantle of being 'an alien in a foreign land,' we as readers may wonder which foreign land does Moses have in mind when he makes that statement" (D. Olson, "Literary and Rhetorical Criticism," in Methods for Exodus, ed. T. Dozeman [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], 39).

that these shifts act as symptom of the deeper issue of the diversity of national identity, for even the pivotal figure of Moses is decidedly mixed: precisely the one who brings about the narrative unity of the people as Israel.

The point should by now be clear: time and again, the textual strands indicate that what counts as "Israel," as a textual item, an imagined community and as a social-political identity, is actually an intersection of many nationalities. Let me add a few more examples: Ruth is a Moabite and also the great-grandmother of David (Ruth 4:17), a relationship David exploits later (1 Sam. 22:3-4), while the Canaanite sex worker, Rahab, becomes part of the people (Josh 6:25; see also Mat. 1:5). Repeatedly, we find Ammonites (Zekei and Zabud), Hittites (Uriaah and Ahimelech), Moabites (Ithmah and Jehozabad), Gittites (Obed-edom), and Edomites (Doeg) among Israelite army, temple staff, and court (1 Sam. 21:7; 22:9; 26:6; 2 Sam. 1:10-11; 11; 23:37; 39; 1 Chron. 11:39, 41, 46, 16:5, 38, 26:8, 15; 2 Chron. 24:26). Further, the account of the conquest of Palestine reveals the continuance of a significant number of groups, especially Canaanites and Hittites (Josh 13:1-6; 15:63; Judg. 1:19-36; see also 1 Kgs 9:20-21). And Solomon has a distinct fondness for Egyptian, Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women (1 Kgs 3:1; 11:1), while the people are constantly marrying Edomites, Midianites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, Amorites, and Ashtodites (2 Sam. 11:3; Numbers 25; Ezra 9-10; Neh. 13:23-27).

Let me sum up the point I have been making thus far with three texts that capture well the sheer diversity of Israel. The first observes: "So the Israelites lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and they took their daughters as wives for themselves, and their own daughters they gave to their sons; and they worshiped their gods" (Judg. 3:5). If this text still harbors the desire for a clear identity for the nationality of Israel, then the next verse is even more direct: "Your origin and your birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite" (Ezek. 16:3). Or as Deut. 26:5 puts it, more simply, "a wandering Aramean was my ancestor." In this light, the observation of Exod. 23:9 expresses the textual situation well indeed: "You know the heart of an alien [nepesh haggir]." The text in this case postulates that one should treat foreigners well, since the people themselves were once foreigners in Egypt. But the text also betrays another sense, in which the heart itself knows what it is like to be foreign, to be an alien.

Although the contexts are quite different, Israel seems to be very much like the HuI discussed earlier. But this is only the first step, leading to the relatively mundane point concerning unity out of diversity—at least as far as the narrative structure is concerned. The tendency toward diversity increases when unity begins to be asserted. The patriarchal and matriarchal accounts in Genesis may seek to distill a form of unity out of diversity, but when the narrative begins to assert the distinctness of the people, or indeed the nationality of Israel in Exodus onwards, diversity increases. I have noted Moses's multiple identity, the man born in Egypt with an Egyptian name, raised by the Pharaoh's daughter, and then disappearing in the land of Moab (Deut. 34:1-8), let alone the multiplicity of his father(s)-in-law.
This intensified diversity follows two paths after Moses. The first is internal, with all manner of "foreigners" in the midst of Israel: Ammonites, Edomites, Moabites, Hittites, and Gittites. The second is external, with the very same nationalities—from Joshua through to Kings/Chronicles—attacking Israel, with varying levels of success or failure, and with some being wiped out again and again only to return in ever greater numbers (especially the Amalekites, descendants of Eliphaz, son of Esau, and Timna—Gen. 36:23). The prophets too call down curse and destruction against all manner of nationalities, if not the occasional empire.

Thus far, the nationalities in question are somewhat known entities. At the fringes are Gittites (reputedly from the Philistine town of Gath), Jebusites (from Jerusalem), Perizzites (apparently part of the Canaanites), Hivites (descendants of Canaan), but they already indicate an intriguing multiplication of nationalities. More and more appear, such as the Geshurites and Maacathites of the Transjordan (Deut. 3:14; Josh 12:1-6, 13:11-13), or the Girzites (1 Sam. 27:8). By the time we get to the list of warriors in 2 Sam. 23:24-39 and 1 Chron. 11:26-47, we find even more: Palites, Hushathites, Abobites, Arbaathites, Harartes, Gilonites, Arbites, Ithrites, Peleonites, Gizonites, Mibnitites, Asherathite, Aroerites, Tizites, Mahavites, and Mezobaites. One may make valiant efforts to identify and categorize such groups, whether in terms of town names or tribes and clans within a people, or indeed as "petty communities." But I would like to emphasize a somewhat different point: they increasingly designate the diversity of nationalities, with ever more found within what appears to be a nationality. Even Israel is subject to this process, in which the "tribes" are given names reserved for nationalities—from Reubenites to Benjaminites. It would seem that this multiplication is the dialectical result of the increasing emphasis on the unity of Israel. As I indicated earlier, this insight appeared theoretically in the mid-19th century, in which unity—even if imposed "from above"—produced unexpected diversity. To gloss a text I quoted earlier, these "hitherto unknown or little-known nationalities" have been given a "new life and a new development."  

**Conclusion: A multinational utopia?**

I close with two questions. First, what is the driver of unity in the overarching narrative? The nationality in question clearly becomes distinct through retrofitted religious (and thereby cultural) features—a version of monotheism, a legal code, institutions, material structures, leadership, and so on. This drive to identity may be regarded as one imposed "from above," an effort to find unity among diversity. The catch is that the more unity is pressed, the more diversity appears. But we may also espy a legendary, if not mythical "history" that stems not merely from Abraham but from the first moments of creation what I have elsewhere called a political myth. This entails the effort to develop a stable community (first in the wilderness), territory (even if conquered), language (of the text), and even an economic system that may be described primarily as a subsistence regime, with a late but marginal effort at a palatial estate system. These are of course the terms I noted earlier in the definition of nationality, with the notable absence of ethnicity. Running through all of this is the determining feature of a spiritual or "psychological storehouse [skula] manifested in a common culture."  

Second, how is this utopian? It is not merely the much sought-after unity of the people, closed off from others, which would then run into the dystopia of Kings/Chronicles and the prophetic condemnations, nor some form of liberal multiculturalism based on a limited European notion of human rights. Instead, the text seems to suggest that it is the very openness, diversity, and incompleteness that arises first in the move to unity (the patriarchal and matriarchal narratives) but even more in the effort to produce a national unity, the desired articulation of which is itself utopian. This effort produces ever greater diversity, internally and externally, in what may be called—with allusion to actually existing socialism—as "actually existing Israel."  

---

44. Or as the Book of Mormon puts it, with unwitting insight, "any manner of -ites" (4 Nephi 1:17).
50. See also ibid., 69.
CONTRIBUTORS

Carolyn Alsen is an educator and researcher in the areas of religious and biblical studies. Her main interest is in Hebrew Bible scholarship using postcolonial, feminist, and ideological criticisms. Particularly, she is engaged in narratological research using the gaze and seeing to re-read and reconstruct Israelite identity in the Hebrew Bible. She also has research experience in biblical Semitic linguistics, critical theory and the Bible, and field work in contextual readings for liberation and Bible translation. She is an Honorary Postdoctoral Associate and Acting Director of Learning and Teaching at the University of Divinity, Australia.

Roland Boer is Distinguished Professor of Literature at Renmin University of China, Beijing. His current research focuses on comparative Marxism and the philosophical basis of socialism in power.

Jeremiah W. Cataldo is Associate Professor of History in the Frederik Meijer Honors College at Grand Valley State University. His research currently focuses on the early formation of monotheism and the place of the Bible in cultural criticism.

Matthew J. M. Coomber is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at St. Ambrose University, an Episcopal priest, and a director at the Center and Library for the Bible and Social Justice. He researches the intersections of Bible and systemic poverty in ancient and modern contexts. In addition to journal articles and book chapters, he is the author of Re-Reading the Prophets through Corporate Globalization (Gorgias), editor of Bible and Justice: Ancient Texts, Modern Challenges (Routledge), and co-editor of Fortress Commentary on the Bible: Old Testament and Apocrypha. Coomber is currently writing Amos and Micah through the Centuries (Wiley Blackwell), and is editing a six-volume series, The Cascade Companion to Bible and Economics (Cascade Books).

Bradley L. Crowell is Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. He received his Ph.D. in Ancient Near Eastern Studies and the Hebrew Bible from the University of Michigan. His publications have appeared in the Journal for Ancient Near Eastern Religions, the Bulletin for the American Society of Oriental Research, Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, Currents in Research: Biblical Studies, and Biblical Interpretation. He is also the co-editor of Excavating Asian History: Interdisciplinary Studies in Archaeology and History with Norman Yoffee.