Ethnicity In, With, or Under the Pentateuch

F. V. Greifenhagen, Luther College at the University of Regina

Abstract

In the last decade a number of scholarly works investigating the phenomenon of ethnicity in the Hebrew Bible have appeared. This essay will address critically the question of whether a focus on ethnicity contributes to a deeper understanding of the Hebrew Bible both in its original setting and in its use and transmission to the present. The Pentateuch arguably is deeply concerned with establishing the true identity of Israel vis-à-vis other nations, peoples, or ethnic groups. The first task will be to address how ethnicity is to be defined, and its usefulness as a conceptual framework for investigating the Pentateuch. Since the greatest concern in the Pentateuch is expressed about Israel's identity in relation to Egypt, the second task will be to address how recent works on ethnicity in the Pentateuch deal with the question of Egypt. This essay will argue that only a reading strategy that goes "against the grain" and attempts to reconstruct that which the text seeks to silence will be able to access the dynamics of ethnic identity formation that lie submerged under the surface of the Pentateuch and the Hebrew Bible.

Introduction

[1] In recent years, ethnicity has caught on as an interpretive concept in studies of the Hebrew Bible. Besides various articles, book-length investigations by Mullen and Sparks, and a volume of essays edited by Brett, have appeared in the last decade, all proposing that the social scientific study of ethnicity is relevant to the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. In this paper, this interest in the Hebrew Bible and ethnicity will be examined from the angle of the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch is a worthy focus for such an investigation because, of all the texts in the Hebrew Bible, the Pentateuch, as the narration of the genesis of Israel, is most deeply concerned about establishing an authoritative identity for biblical Israel vis-à-vis other communities. It thus promises to lend itself especially well to interpretation through the lens of ethnicity. The question is whether this promise can be realized; that is, whether there is such a thing as ethnicity in, with, or under the Pentateuch.

[2] The wording "in, with, or under" is evocative of a variety of ways in which the social scientific concept of ethnicity can be brought into relation with the Pentateuch (or, for that matter, the Hebrew Bible). (1) Ethnicity can be seen as a phenomenon that comes to expression *in* the text of the Pentateuch itself. (2) Ethnicity can be utilized as a concept *with* which a modern reading of the Pentateuch can be juxtaposed for interpretive profit. (3) Ethnicity can be interpreted as a dynamic that lies hidden or implicit *under* or behind the text of the Pentateuch, requiring a hermeneutics of uncovering and reconstitution. These possibilities will be considered again below. But first it is necessary to briefly examine how ethnicity is defined, and how it is used in some of these recent works on the Hebrew Bible.

The Concept of Ethnicity

[3] There are many definitions of ethnicity; here only the core elements of ethnicity, as they recur in various studies are identified.[1] The first core element is that ethnicity is a social process concerned above all with a dichotomy or boundary between "us" and "them." Since the work of Fredrik Barth, it has been recognized that ethnicity is best understood as a cultural practice of differentiation or a form of social organization in which the boundary between "us" and "them" is of constitutive importance, over and above the cultural stuff it encloses.[2]

[4] A second core element of a definition of ethnicity is that the ethnic boundary is most often characterized on the inside by a past-oriented, subjective belief in common descent, and thus a common ancestral history or mythology.[3] It matters not whether such common descent or history is actual or fictive, or a bit of each. In fact, such common ancestral origins are usually presented in what could be called ethnomythographies, in which actual origins are obscured behind centuries of historical development and cultural inventiveness.[4]

[5] A third core element of a definition of ethnicity is that the ethnic boundary is most often characterized on the outside by the role of "others" who act as a contrastive foil against which ethnic identity is articulated. In other words, members of an ethnic group define who they are by who they are not. These "others" are usually not distant groups;[5] rather, much more urgent is the invocation of a sense of difference from "proximate others" or "near neighbors" who share actual similarities with the group attempting to define itself ethnically.[6]

[6] To summarize thus far: ethnicity fundamentally involves the construction of boundaries between "us" and "them," and two essential features of such boundaries are an ethnomythology

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[1] Although the concept of an ethnic group or *ethnos* is quite ancient (the term is used, for instance, in Homer), the abstract noun "ethnicity" is itself relatively new, with the first recorded usage (in the *Oxford English Dictionary*) being dated to 1953. For a history of the term, see Tonkin. In the 1960s and 1970s the term came into wide usage in the social sciences amidst a proliferation of case studies and theories of ethnicity. Unfortunately, such proliferation threatens to make ethnicity into a catchall term, signaling "virtually any category of group identity, even gender" (Tilley: 498).

[2] A more recent investigation of ethnicity, obviously indebted to Barth, characterizes ethnicity as "a series of nesting dichotomizations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness. The process of assigning persons to groups is both subjective and objective, carried out by self and others, and depends on what diacritics are used to define membership" (Cohen: 387).

[3] A subjective belief in common descent was recognized by Max Weber (385) as characteristic of an ethnic group, and most definitions of ethnicity follow suit in attributing definitive importance to this characteristic. Cohen, for instance, notes that ethnic diacritics "always have about them an aura of descent" and goes on to speak of descent-based cultural identifiers (387), while Levine concludes that his study validates a minimalist concept of ethnicity as a system of classification based on descent and origin (155-70). Geoff Emberling describes self-ascription of common ancestry as "perhaps the most fundamental characteristic of ethnicity" (302) and A. P. Royce (23) points to belief in common descent, supported by myths or a partly fictitious history, as the most important element in ethnicity. Such references could be multiplied many times over.

[4] I have borrowed the term ethnomythography from Mullen. A. D. Smith has identified the typical tropes of an ethnomythography: temporal origins, spatial origins, the apical ancestor, migration, liberation from oppression, golden age, decline, and rebirth (182). It should be noted that the myth of common origin will often be ritually reactualized in the ethnic community to support and maintain its boundary drawing function.

[5] These are so obviously different that a rhetoric of differentiation is unnecessary.

[6] J.Z. Smith has forcefully drawn attention to this dynamic.

of common ancestry and a rhetoric of contrast with "others."[7] To these a fourth core element of a definition of ethnicity must be added: the recognition that, although ethnic sentiments exert a strong, seemingly primordial emotional pull, ethnic identity is an intersubjective social construction[8] produced as a human response to particular circumstances, especially assymetrical relations closely related to state formation, expansion, and maintenance.[9] Several corollaries follow from this core element.

[7] First, ethnicity is likely to occur on the spatial and/or sociopolitical margin or periphery of expanding states or empires. Thus, the prime conditions for the construction of Israelite ethnicity would seem to occur at the time of the Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and Persian phases of imperial expansion in the ancient Near East. Second, as a subjective category of self and other ascription, ethnicity will be located most definitively in the written remains and artifacts of a society, and will be difficult to pinpoint from the purely material data of archaeology.[10] Third, as a subjective cognitive construct, ethnicity will project an ideal conceptual identity or norm that will not necessarily coincide with actual empirical behavior in a society.[11] For example, the ethnic ideology of a community may posit rigid boundaries circumscribing contact with those considered "others," whereas, in reality, there may be considerable movement across, or

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[7] Other markers of ethnicity often mentioned in the literature include strategies of endogamy, a tradition of a homeland or spatial center, a common religious cult, and a common language. However, these further characteristics do not seem to be as essential to the notion of ethnicity as that of a differentiating boundary characterized by a myth of common ancestry and a rhetoric of contrast with "others." While such further characteristics may be an important component of particular ethnic identities, they can also just as well be found employed in the service of other identities, such as national, religious, political, class, or cultural. Emberling (304-6) carefully distinguishes between ethnic identity and other social identities on the basis that a myth of kinship is essential to ethnicity. National identity is close to ethnicity in that it also often employs notions of a common history and ancestry, but it differs in that it is linked to a particular political polity.

[8] It used to be thought that ethnicity was primarily a primordial phenomenon determined by deep cultural, psychological, or even biological drives or instincts. From this perspective, ethnic identity is underived, prior to all interaction, ineffable, overpoweringly coercive, and largely a mechanism of affect. This perspective has generally been abandoned in favor of approaches that recognize ethnicity as a mechanism of cognition and social construction. One extreme version of this trend treats ethnicity as purely a political tool used to legitimize claims in the public domain and to manipulate collective identities to achieve power. A more balanced approach suggests that ethnic identities are socially constructed or creatively imagined "to explain a group identity in relation to some Other - whose identity is likewise 'imagined' and often ascribed value whether to dignify or to debase" (Tilley: 511). Such an approach recognizes both the strong primordial pull that ethnic sentiments can exert, as well as the intersubjective constructedness of ethnic identities.

[9] As an expanding state conquers or assimilates previously independent groups, it often increases the rigidity of cultural boundaries as a strategy of control. Conversely, expanding states or empires often force large communities to migrate; these communities tend to construct a strategy of distinctiveness for survival and resistance, resulting in the formation of ethnic enclaves (Emberling: 308).

[10] Unless such data is undergirded by reliable and contemporary written documentation. Thus the quest to find evidence of Israelite ethnicity in the archaeological evidence of the Late Bronze and Early Iron ages seems ultimately unable to be substantiated unless contemporary written evidence with indicators of self and other ascription are also uncovered. Only a rather uncritical reading of the biblical texts as documents dating back to this period has enabled the quest to proceed at all. On this issue see the divergent views of Dever, Finkelstein, and Thompson. For good overviews of the problem from strictly archaeological perspectives (i.e. unfettered by prior assumptions of traditional biblical scholarship), see Emberling and Small.

[11] That ethnicity is a subjectively constructed cognitive ideal means that the phenomenon is especially suited to ideological critique.

deviation from, these boundaries. And fourth, ethnicity, as a cognitive construct or ideology, is likely to be a creation of the elite literate stratum of a society insofar as our evidence necessarily depends on the written documentation of self and other ascription produced by such elites. While demotic or popular notions of ethnicity surely existed, they are extremely difficult to detect and trace in the ancient record.[12]

[8] Given this outline of the basic conceptual content of the notion of ethnicity, let me turn briefly to consider two recent efforts to use ethnicity as a tool for the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible.

Two Investigations of Ethnicity and the Hebrew Bible

[9] E. Theodore Mullen, Jr. has produced two book-length studies of ethnicity in the Hebrew Bible. The first book, *Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries* (1993), analyzes the Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy through Kings) as an ethnogomic myth for Israelite identity.[13] Skeptical of traditional source-critical approaches,[14] Mullen favors an analysis of the final form of the text, which he dates circa 550 B.C.E. in the Babylonian exile. He sees Deuteronomy as a social manifesto setting the boundaries of an ideal ethnic group named Israel; the rest of the Deuteronomistic History he interprets as a refining and reformulation of those boundaries. The writing of the Deuteronomistic History was precipitated, he contends, by the crisis of the exile,[15] which stimulated a literate elite in Babylon to imagine a new community and to give it a history via ancient and invented traditions.

[10] In a second book, *Ethnic Myths and Pentateuchal Foundations: A New Approach to the Formation of the Pentateuch* (1997), Mullen extends his investigations into the Pentateuch proper. He argues here for the composition of a Tetrateuch (Genesis through Numbers) in the Persian period as a prologue and supplement to the previously composed Deuteronomistic History. The impetus for the composition of this Tetrateuch, he contends, was the growing recognition of the community in Yehud that the restoration of kingship was not imminent. This led to a reformulation of the deuteronomistic ideal of a community organized around a king into the ideal of a community that understands itself as a genealogically related group (that is, an ethnic group) organized around a specific cultic pattern (1997: 323).[16]

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[12] As a writtten production of a literate elite, the Pentateuch, for example, will reflect the particular ethnic ideals projected by that elite.

[13] As indicated by the subtitle of his work, *The Deuteronomistic Historian and the Creation of Israelite National Identity.*

[14] Mullen does not see discrepancies or contradictions in the Pentateuch as pointing to different sources and a long history of diachronic development, as in traditional historical-critical approaches, but rather interprets them as evidence of the variety of contemporaneous traditions which the scribes attempted to include. The final form of the Pentateuch, Mullen contends, was not meant to be read as literary whole, but was rather meant as a general collection of materials, paratactically sequenced, from which parts could be extracted for various purposes (1997: 325).

[15] Mullen makes frequent reference to Victor Turner's concept of "social drama," in which a crisis leads to a breach in the established order, necessitating the creation or recreation of a new order.

[16] Only much later was the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy) recognized as a separate entity and identified with the "Torah." Mullen interprets the "Torah" mentioned in texts of the Hebrew Bible as a reference generally to sacred lore which is described in the form of "books" as a rhetorical claim to authority. In the Deuteronomistic

[11] In his readings of the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History through the lens of ethnicity, Mullen helpfully characterizes the final text as an ethnomythography (1997: 88, 126) - that is, as the creation of an idealized past for the formation and maintenance of a distinct ethnic identity in the present.[17] He repeatedly demonstrates that the ideals of ethnic identity dominate and shape the rhetoric of the Pentateuch.[18] Mullen thus provides an approach that is most helpful in contextualizing the Pentateuch in the period of its primary production and consumption, which he, along with many scholars today, believes took place in the Persian period. What seems to be missing in Mullen's analysis, however, is an explicit ideological critique of the Pentateuch's construction of ethnicity - a critique that seeks to uncover the suppressions and oppositions on which the text's dominant ideology is constructed.

[12] For example, two core elements of ethnicity are a common origin tradition and the contrast with "others." These are ideal constructions, even imaginative and inventive, and therefore require a critical ideological analysis. Yet, on the issue of a common origin tradition, Mullen generally seems to present, rather than critique, the Pentateuch's master narrative of Israelite origins; that is, of distant origins in Mesopotamia, a detour through Egypt, and a final settlement in the promised land of the Cisjordan. For instance, by analyzing the whole Egyptian sojourn within the confines of the plot of the master narrative, it becomes "simply a time of growth and prosperity from which a mighty nation 'Israel'" would emerge (Mullen 1997: 160). What of the fractures in the master narrative caused by the qualitative difference of the Joseph narrative from the previous ancestor narratives in Genesis, or the thematic disparity between Genesis and Exodus?[19] While recognized by Mullen (for example, 1997: 163-65), these fractures are explained as the result of what he believes to be the Pentateuch's original function as a collection of didactic, and not necessarily tightly connected installments, rather than as a literary or narrative whole. What is missed with such an approach is that the Pentateuch may be shaping disparate origin traditions, familiar to its intended audience,[20] to fit its own particular ideological

History, "Torah" refers to the book of Deuteronomy. Not until the second century B.C.E. is there an equation between "Torah" and "Pentateuch" (Mullen 1997: 41ff.)

[17] In so doing, he makes effective use of Barth's focus on ethnic boundaries, Royce's listing of the essential characteristics of ethnicity, and A. D. Smith's analysis of the tropes of ethnic narrative.

[18] Occasionally Mullen blurs the distinction between ethnic identity and other forms of identity such as religion and nation. Mullen claims, for instance, that one of the major functions of religions is the development and maintenance of ethnic groups (1993: 36-37). While religion can play an important part in the delineation of ethnic group boundaries, I would argue that the construction of a common origin myth is more central to ethnic identity. While religion may play an important part in such ethnomyths, it is also possible for different ethnic groups to share the same religious sensibilities. For further examples of the same confusion or overlap of ethnic and religious identity, see Mullen 1997: 206, 219, 230, 330-31 (Mullen makes use of Geertz here). Mullen is also aware of the argument that nations and nationalism are modern post-industrial developments, but nevertheless sees strong affinities between ethnicity and nationalism (1993: 230-31), and speaks of the Deuteronomistic History as "a form of national and ethnic myth" (1993: 284). See also Mullen 1997: 205, 229, 264, 327 (Mullen makes us of A. D. Smith here).

[19] Scholars have long recognized the stylistic and other unique features that set the Joseph story apart from the rest of Genesis and justify labeling it a self-contained "novella." Genesis and Exodus present disparate thematic emphases; for example, the only references in Exodus to the patriarchal promises so dominant in Genesis seem to be later editorial links forged between the two books.

[20] The term "audience" or "intended audience" is used throughout this article to describe the population towards which the Pentateuch in its final text form was directed by its producers (writers/redactors). The term "audience" is preferable to "readers" since it is likely that the Pentateuch was originally, at least in part, meant to be presented orally to a largely illiterate audience. The term is also meant to leave open the possibility that various and disparate

master narrative. For example, Mullen's view that the Persian period redactors of the Pentateuch saw Egypt largely as a metaphor for the Babylonian exile (1997: 166, 182) erases the specificity of, and possible tension between, the ideological functions of Babylon and Egypt in the Pentateuch.

[13] On the issue of an ethnic contrast with "others," Mullen similarly seems to present, rather than critique, the Pentateuch's contrast of Israel with the major "other" in the Pentateuch, namely the Egyptians.[21] For example, Mullen tends to accept at face value the distinction between Israel and Egypt, which is argued for throughout the first half of Exodus, rather than analyzing it as one position among other possibilities. In contrast, the rhetoric of Israel's distinction from the Canaanites he deals with in a more nuanced fashion.[22] Yet, from a critical perspective, the Pentateuch's construction of a contrast between Israel and Egypt is just as suspect as is its construction of a contrast between Israel and Canaan.[23]

[14] In summary, Mullen convincingly demonstrates that ethnicity is a major phenomenon expressed *in* the text of the Pentateuch. However, his analysis seems at points to lack the uncovering of the ideological dynamics of ethnicity that may be hidden *under* or behind the text. Thus, while recognizing the plurality of contending groups that likely constituted the intended audience of the Pentateuch, Mullen does not exploit the ideological clues within the text in order to reconstruct the particular position of the Pentateuch in the midst of this plurality. He argues that the scribes who compiled the Pentateuch were attempting to be as inclusive of the multitude of variant traditions in this plural situation as possible (that is, that they were constructing aggregative rather than contrastive identity).[24] While helpful in balancing the diachronism of

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views existed among those intended to be the first hearers/readers of the final text form. Of course, the specification of the "intended audience" depends on the time period in which the final writing and redaction of the Pentateuch are located. While disputed, this article, along with Mullen and others, generally assumes that such final shaping of the Penateuch took place in the Persian period, and that various views on the identity of Israel likely existed during this period.

[21] While Philistines and Babylonians are prominent as "others" over against biblical Israel elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, in the Pentateuch Egypt predominantly plays this role. The Pentateuch contains over half of the occurrences of the word "Egypt" in the Hebrew Bible and also the highest density of the word in the Hebrew Bible - it occurs there on average over twice the average number of occurrences in the Hebrew Bible as a whole. These statistics are based on the information in Andersen and Forbes.

[22] For instance, recognizing that from an archaeological perspective, the culture and religion of Israel and Judah are Canaanite, Mullen correctly notes that "the need to define Israel is one based not on the reality of existing distinctions, but rather on the insistence that there are such distinctions" (1993: 70). The deuteronomistic writer, Mullen observes, does not just paint a picture of the ideal Israel but also produces (invents) the authoritative traditions that support and legitimize that picture (1993: 97).

[23] This critique is further elaborated in the next section below.

[24] In this work, Mullen introduces a very helpful distinction between what I call contrastive ethnicity and aggregative ethnicity. Contrastive ethnicity is constructed through the deliberate contrast between "us" and "them" and seeks to impose the hegemony of a particular identity upon the whole target community. Aggregative ethnicity is constructed through the deliberative amalgamation of a variety of traditions and identities and seeks irenically to offer a compromise identity that all or most segments of the target community can accept. The story of Dinah and Shechem (Genesis 34), for instance, pits these two forms of ethnogenesis against each other, and in this story the contrastive form wins out. Ironically, however, the Pentateuch as a whole, according to Mullen, leans toward a more aggregative form of ethnicity since the scribes who constructed it attempted to be as inclusive as possible by including different or variant contemporaneous traditions. (For a somewhat different contrast between "aggregative" and "oppositional" ethnicity, see Sparks: 55).

traditional source criticism, again such an approach should not obscure the ideological aims of the producers of the text.

[15] The second example is the recent book by Kenton L. Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel* (1998), subtitled a "prolegomena to the study of ethnic sentiments and their expression in the Hebrew Bible."[25] In contrast to Mullen, Sparks reads the biblical record, not in its final text form, but as a series of diachronically developing traditions. The result is a study of ethnic sentiment in the Hebrew Bible beginning with what he identifies as the earliest discernable sources (Deborah's Song in Judges 5, containing traditions he believes tracable to as early as 1100 BCE) and continuing with an examination of the development of such sentiment through successive stages in various texts until the early exile. Thus, while Mullen bases his investigation on the production of the final text form of the Hebrew Bible in the exilic and Persian periods, Sparks begins with a reconstruction of early sources, almost all from the prophets, which he dates to various periods before the exile.[26]

[16] What Sparks discovers, unsurprisingly, is that Israelite ethnicity has developed from the more simple to the more complex. Beginning with a number of separate tribes, each associated with a separate territory,[27] a sense of ethnic identity slowly developed,[28] becoming predominant only in the exile in order both to resist assimilation to Babylon or Persia, and to legitimize the claims of the returnees against those who had stayed in the land.[29] Sparks contextualizes this development within the wider phenomenon of ethnicity in the Ancient Near East, especially

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[25] Like Mullen, Sparks uses the concept of ethnicity as a lens to understand and interpret the biblical record. While Mullen makes use of some of the anthropological and sociological literature on ethnicity (e.g. the likes of A. P. Royce. A. D. Smith, and F. Barth, but with a marked preference for the sociocultural approaches of P. Berger, T. Luckman, C. Geertz, and V. Turner), Sparks mentions these sources far more sparsely; the sociologist I. Wallerstein seems to be an important influence for him.

[26] Almost all of the texts that he analyzes are selected from the prophets, especially Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; with the exception of the Song of Deborah and the book of Deuteronomy, the Pentateuch is not under consideration. Sparks agrees with his doctoral supervisor, Van Seters, that the classic sources of the Pentateuch are not early, and therefore he prefers to rely on "our most datable sources" (320), that is, the prophetic corpus and Deuteronomy. In sum, Sparks differs from Mullen in his diachronic approach, in his focus on pre-exilic history, and in his selection of texts.

[27] Sparks sees the seed of Israelite ethnicity already in the Merneptah Stele, but acknowledges the speculative nature of this interpretation.

[28] Sparks argues that ethnic identity played a secondary role to national identity during the history of the two kingdoms. Furthermore, the southern kingdom tended to have softer ethnic boundaries than its northern neighbor, which, possibly influenced by Greek ethnic notions via the Phoenicians, witnessed the use of ethnicity in polemic favoring a mono-Yahwistic religious orientation. After the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 BCE, northern refugees brought their ideas of ethnicity south and used them in the construction of a deuteronomistic outlook, in which ethnic sentiment is employed to unite northerners and southerners as "brothers" having a common ethnohistorical heritage in the exodus.

[29] Dispute over ownership of the Abraham traditions is seen by Sparks as characterizing this last period of the return from exile. It should be noted that throughout this developmental process, Sparks argues that ethnicity played a secondary role to religious identity; furthermore, while ethnic sentiment mandated the drawing of boundaries between "us" and "them," he also finds evidence in the biblical texts of an ongoing keen interest in the assimilation of foreigners into Israel.

among the Assyrians, Greeks, and Egyptians,[30] which constitutes an obvious strength of his analysis. Very suggestive also is his elucidation of ethnic eponymy, especially his distinction between exonyms and endonyms (Sparks: 54, 105-8).[31]

[17] However, in the end, Sparks' analysis of ethnicity in the Hebrew Bible depends on the viability of his particular diachronic approach (in which the final text form is discounted in the interests of discerning the composition of earlier and more original sources), which remains speculative, no matter how confident one is in its methods and the results.[32] Furthermore, Sparks tends to read the sources, as he reconstructs them, as more-or-less accurate depictions. Like Mullen, he thus shows a tendency to read the texts "with the grain," as representational rather than rhetorical or ideological. An important consequence is Sparks' underlying assumption of a monolithic Israelite ethnic identity that, while it develops through time, also displays a strong continuity throughout the centuries *and* in the biblical texts. While the notion of competing forms of ethnic identity is not foreign to Sparks' work,[33] his reading strategy tends to underplay the possibility of such competing forms in the Hebrew Bible.[34] In contrast, a careful "counter-reading" of the biblical master origin tradition for Israel and the use of "others" in the Hebrew Bible as a contrastive foil over against which Israelite identity is constructed, reveals a plurality of competing ethnic visions *under* or behind the Hebrew Bible.

[18] To summarize, the works here considered demonstrate that many parts of the Hebrew Bible, including the Pentateuch, can be interpreted as functioning to construct, consolidate and maintain a particular Israelite ethnic identity, based on an ethnomythography of common origins and kinship, and on boundaries between "them" and "us." Obviously, the concept of ethnicity can be juxtaposed *with* the texts of the Hebrew Bible, including the Pentateuch, for interpretive profit. Based on the readings of these scholars and others, one could further argue that the phenomenon of ethnic identity is present *in* the Hebrew Bible, including especially the Pentateuch, in some fundamental way. However, if ethnicity is articulated in written documents in the form of ideological rhetoric that seeks to persuade the audience of one form of identity above others, and thus necessarily obscures, suppresses, and otherwise distorts or erases alternate possibilities, then ethnicity is also a deeper phenomenon that lies submerged *under* the surface of the Pentateuch, and the Hebrew Bible.

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[30] An underlying thread is Spark's suggestion that Greek notions of ethnicity are most akin to the developing notion of Israelite ethnicity and may have directly influenced it. However, Spark does not pursue this idea in detail and identifies it as an area for further investigation.

[31] An exonym is a name applied to an ethnic group by outsiders, while an endonym is a name that members of the ethnic group call themselves.

[32] Sparks' use of terminology such as "conclusive evidence" (146), "unimpeacable sources" (171), "undoubtedly" (190), "obviously" (209), and the like becomes somewhat annoying given the speculative nature of the enterprise.

[33] Sparks recognizes that the sources of the Hebrew Bible are the work of only one perspective and thus reflect only one of several competing communities or parties in ancient Israel (16), a recognition that opens the possibility for ideological critique. However, he does not attempt to reconstruct possible other perspectives and so one is left with the impression that the ethnic sentiments expressed in the Hebrew Bible are indicative of all Israel.

[34] For instance, Sparks negates the importance of Egypt in the construction of Israelite notions of identity (75-76), a point to which I will return below. Like Mullen, Sparks generalizes the "others" over against which Israelite ethnic identity is constructed instead of analyzing them in their specificity.

[19] This submerged level can be accessed by a reading strategy that goes "against the grain" and attempts to reconstruct that which the text seeks to silence. It means asking what other ethnic origin traditions were possibly in play, and whether the "others" were really other in the way that the texts wish their audience to believe. It is this sort of reading strategy which seems to be lacking somewhat in the works described above. The following section will look more closely at Egypt as an "other" in the Pentateuch's ethnic discourse in order to uncover some of the dynamics which could further supplement and fill the gaps in the approaches of Mullen and Sparks.

Egypt as Ethnic "Other" in the Pentateuch

[20] Mullen has most directly engaged the Pentateuch through the lens of ethnicity, asserting that the Pentateuch originated in the context of, and was directed to an audience of, a plurality of contending groups, in order to construct a unifying sense of Israelite ethnic identity. How the creators of the Pentateuch wished to construct such an identity in this plural situation could be indicated, according to the dynamics of ethnogenesis, by an analysis of the specific portrayal of ethnic "others" in the text. Interestingly, Mullen seems to single out only the Canaanites as ethnic "others" in the Pentateuch worthy of such an analysis, while Egypt is largely ignored. And yet Egypt is arguably the most important ethnic "other" in the Pentateuch, being mentioned some 376 times in the Pentateuch over against 96 references to Canaanites.[35] However, instead of being interrogated as to the specificity of its historically contextualized function in the Pentateuch's ideological rhetoric, Egypt, in Mullen's analysis, tends to be generalized and universalized. The polemical distinction made between Egypt and Israel in the text is accepted as natural or self-evident and is not problematized.

[21] For instance, Mullen's analysis of Exodus 2 (1997: 173-76) presents the text's argument for a distinct Israelite identity as embodied in the origins of Moses as ethnic hero. But his analysis does not question or situate the text's ethnomythic claim of difference between Egypt and Israel or recognize the ambiguities in the narrative that embodies that claim. Similarly, his truncated treatment of the plague narrative (1997: 185-86) only makes a fleeting reference to that narrative's insistence on separation between Israel and Egypt and does not interrogate this separation. The fact that an Egyptian is involved in the story of the blasphemer in Leviticus 24:10-16 is not subject to analysis (1997: 243). Furthermore, Egypt is ultimately interpreted as a general metaphor or symbol:

> If one removes the action from the specific historical context in which it is presented and understands these narratives in the context of an exiled people looking for hope of some form of restoration and return to their land, then Egypt and the Pharaoh may be understood in metaphoric terms as *any* land and ruler that would try to enslave the people of Yahweh and hinder them from their service to him (1997: 182, my emphasis).[36]

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[35] These figures are based on the statistics in Anderson and Forbes. See also note 21. It should also be noted that additional ethnic "others" appear in the Pentateuch: Moab (47 occurrences), Edom (23 occurrences), Midian (17 occurrences), the Philistines (11 occurrences), and Ammon (10 occurrences).

[36] Mullen here engages in a universalizing dissolution that evades the specificity of the problematic of ethnicity in the text. Universalizing dissolutions are one of the means of evading the recovery of memories of conflict and exclusion, and of the disclosure of subjugated knowledges and their role in political struggles. See Welch (71-73), who makes use of Foucault's contrast between genealogical and historical investigation.

[22] Egypt does not figure prominently in Sparks' analysis of ethnicity in ancient Israel mainly because he does not directly engage the Pentateuch; his traditio-historical approach ends with the exilic period.[37] Thus, he does deal with Deuteronomy but quite apart from the preceding four books of the Pentateuch. However, in his impressive analysis of ethnicity in Hosea (126-68), he highlights the presence of two conflicting origin traditions in the prophet: one connected with the ethnic ancestor Israel/Jacob, and the other concerning the migration from Egypt. This would seem to provide fertile ground for the exploration of ethnicity as an ideological construct, and promises intriguing connections with the Pentateuch's focus on Egypt as ethnic "other." But for Sparks this conflict of origin traditions is relegated (and confined) to a particular past phase of the historical development of Israelite ethnicity, and is furthermore read as a representational description rather than an ideological construction. Even Egyptian ethnic conceptions are discounted in favor of Greek ethnic models, which Sparks argues have the greatest affinity with the Hebrew Bible (92-93).

[23] Thus, both Mullen and Sparks tend to accept the Hebrew Bible's representation of the separation of Israel from Egypt, it's ethnic "other," instead of subjecting this representation to critique. In contrast, from a more ideological critical perspective, it can be argued that the distinction between Israel and Egypt is not presumed by the Pentateuchal text to be a natural, generally accepted fact. Rather, by insisting that Egypt and Israel are distinct, the Pentateuch indicates that this was a point of which at least some members of its audience needed to be convinced.[38] Furthermore, even where the Pentateuch most vociferously insists on such a distinction, such as in the narrative of the plagues in Exodus 7-11, the text contains clues that allow for the reconstruction of other voices that do not necessarily accept such a distinction.[39] Reading "against the grain" uncovers the ideological work for which the text was launched.[40] In

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[37] He considers the Tetrateuchal sources to be too late and yet not datable precisely enough for the purpose of traditio-historical reconstruction (14-16).

[38] I am thinking particularly of the plague narrative in Exodus 7:8-11:10 in which YHWH three times forcibly insists on a clear distinction between Israel and Egypt (8:19 [Eng: 23], 9:4, 11:7). That the distinction is insisted upon with such vigor suggests that, in the context of the primary production and consumption of the final text form, this distinction was not self-evident but needed to be established in opposition to alternate views. The entire plague narrative, of course, in a variety of ways functions to establish this distinction between Israel and Egypt, from the contest with the Egyptian magicians to the exemption of Israel from (some of) the plagues.

[39] While the dominant divine voice in the plague narrative insists on an irrevocable and absolute separation between Israel and Egypt, other submerged voices blur this distinction. For example, the ethnic oppositional rhetoric of "us" versus "them," while strong in divine speech, is muted and confused in the speech of Pharaoh and Moses. The exemption of Israel from the plagues is incomplete and ambiguous. And allusions to the possibility of Egyptian worship of YHWH are found in the Egyptian magicians' recognition of legitimate divine power in the plagues (Exodus 815 [Eng: 19]) and in the presence of "YHWH-fearers" among those attached to the Egyptian court (Exodus 9:20).

[40] While Mullen begins such a reading with his recognition of the Pentateuch as ethnomythography, the specificity of the particular ethnomythography of the Pentateuch in its context of production remains under scrutinized. While Sparks and other authors writing on ethnicity and the Hebrew Bible do not focus directly on the Pentateuch as such, they exhibit the same tendency to elide, in effect, the "others" over against which Israel's ethnic identity is constructed, in particular Egypt. For example, the passages from Hosea that Sparks analyzes (129-36, 160-67) include frequent mention of Egypt and of the exodus, but such occurrences are not interpreted in their specificity. Another example would be Crüsemann's investigation of Israel's self-identity as portrayed in the genealogical system of Genesis, in which he subjects almost every group on the Table of Nations (Genesis 10) to scrutiny, except for Egypt.

the following, I will briefly summarize some results of my investigations of Egypt in the Pentateuch from this perspective.[41]

[24] First is the issue of origin traditions, so central to an ethnic ideology. The Pentateuch provides an ethnomythography for Israel by promoting a master narrative that places Israel's origins in Mesopotamia. The sojourn in Egypt is portrayed as only a temporary detour on the way to claiming a rightful patrimony in the Cisjordan.[42] However, it seems to me that this ethnomyth has overwritten an alternative Egyptian origin tradition for Israel. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, there are texts which seem to know only an origin tradition beginning in Egypt for biblical Israel (for example, Amos, Ezekiel 20, and Psalms 78, 106, and 136),[43] as is also the case for some of the oldest accounts of Judean or Jewish origins in Greek literature.[44] The narratives of Joseph and Moses on their own could stand as testimonies to Egyptian Israelite heroes, but are linked in the Pentateuch to the programmatic ancestral accounts of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, making Israel's time in Egypt a temporary detour rather than a point of origin. The overall shape of the final text form of the Pentateuch suggests that this linkage is a deliberate redactional means of incorporating at least two different narratives of biblical Israel's origin, the story of Joseph functioning as a hinge between the two.[45]

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[41] For a full presentation of the data and the arguments, see my doctoral dissertation. For ease of discussion, I there divide the cognitive map of Egypt in the Pentateuch into five major topoi: (1) the issue of origin traditions and the ethnogenesis of Israel; (2) the depiction of Egypt as a negative place; (3) the use of Egypt as an emblem for Israel's distinctiveness; (4) the displacement of Egyptian Israelite heroes like Joseph and Moses by a pro-Mesopotamian orientation defined by Abraham; and (5) the condemnation of a return to Egypt.

[42] This master narrative is proleptically enacted by Abraham (as well as, to a certain extent, by Jacob), is actualized in the sequence of the Joseph and Exodus cycles, and is summed up near the end of the Pentateuch by the credo in Deuteronomy 26.

[43] Hosea knows both the traditions of the exodus and of the ancestor Jacob (see especially chapter 12), but seems to pit the mosaic tradition against the patriarchal tradition. This interpretation has been forcefully argued by de Pury, who sees Hosea as championing the mosaic exodus origin tradition of a "YHWH alone" party (see M. Smith) against the more tolerant, tribally based patriarchal traditions. When one is to date Hosea 12 is a matter of dispute; Whitt, for instance, argues for an eighth century B.C.E. date for most of the Jacob material in this chapter, with the exception of later glosses such as verses 6-7. A comparison of Psalm 106, which knows only an origin for biblical Israel in Egypt, with Psalm 105, which includes also the patriarchal traditions of Genesis, could suggest either that Psalm 106 is pre-Pentateuchal and thus predates Psalm 105, which reflects the Pentateuchal master narrative, or that these two Psalms originate in concurrent different milieus or among different parties in which differing origin traditions were valued and celebrated.

[44] The oldest account of Judean or Jewish origins in Greek literature derives from Hecataeus of Abdera (ca. 300 B.C.E.), quoted in book 40 of Diodorus Siculus' *Bibliotheca Historica,* which has survived in the *Bibliotheca* of Photius (Stern: 20-44). Hecataeus claims that the Jews originated when foreigners were expelled from Egypt at a time of pestilence; under their leader Moses, they established a colony in Judea around the city Jerusalem, and they continue to revere the "words Moses heard from God." (For a positive assessment of the evidence of Hecataeus, see Davies (1995: 163-68). The Egyptian Hellenistic historian Manetho (third century B.C.E.), fragments of whose writing survive in Josephus, identified Jewish origins both with the Hyksos, expelled from Egypt, and with a group of lepers under a priest named Osarsiph, understood to be Moses, also expelled from Egypt (Stern: 62-86). Although in both these cases, the Jews are seen as not native to Egypt, the origin tradition begins in Egypt. In the works of the first century B.C.E. historian Diodorus Siculus and the geographer Strabo of Amaseia (Stern: 167-89, 261-315), Jews are described as originally being Egyptians.

[45] The story of Joseph has long been recognized as qualitatively different from the narrative which precedes and follows it, thus giving the appearance that it has been inserted to function as a link between the narrative of the ancestors, which posit biblical Israel's beginnings in Mesopotamia, and the narrative of the exodus, which begins

[25] The final text of the Pentateuch thus integrates two concurrent and conflicting origin traditions by subordinating one to the other. The covenantal prophetic model of Exodus through Deuteronomy (and also the Deuteronomistic History), with its Mosaic ethnomyth of Israelite origins beginning in Egypt, is made to fit within the genealogical model of Genesis, with its patriarchal ethnomyth of Israelite origins in Mesopotamia.[46] This combination is a product, I would argue, of the Persian period, the most likely era in which the texts of the Pentateuch were redacted into a form similar to those that exist today.[47] The Persian period was one in which imperial loyalty was required of Persian dependencies such as Yehud in the face of the challenges to Persian hegemony on the western front, epitomized by a rebellious Egypt. Thus, origin traditions rooted in Egypt would not have provided beneficial sociopolitical capital for the leaders of the restoration community in Yehud and would need to be neutralized. Furthermore, by negating Egypt in favor of Mesoptamia, the Mesopotamian origins of the literate intelligensia of the restoration community of Yehud would be vindicated.

[26] This contest of origin traditions leads directly to the second, and final, point: a reconsideration of the Pentateuch's dominant negative evaluation of Egypt as Israel's "other." The Pentateuch constructs a strong sense of discontinuity between Israel and Egypt by insisting that Israel, to be truly Israel, must be purged of all things Egyptian. Thus, the "endangered-ancestor" series in Genesis (12:10-20; 20:1-18; 26:1-11) shows a progressive distancing from Egypt, the Egyptian Hagar and her son are rejected from the lineage of Israel (Genesis 16, 21), the Israelites are persuaded to physically exit from Egypt (Exodus 1-14), the blaspheming half-Egyptian son in Leviticus (24:10-23) is stoned, and finally the entire Egyptian-born generation, including Moses, must expire in the wilderness and only an entirely new generation, untouched

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biblical Israel's story in Egypt. Römer (1987) argues that the Joseph story is a production of the Egyptian diaspora, giving it an identity and hero, and that it was meant to oppose the developing "orthodoxy" of Jerusalem by positing a reverse exodus from Palestine into Egypt. Only during the final redactional stage of the Pentateuch was the story of Joseph incorporated. If so, then the final text form of the Pentateuch represents the subordination of even this oppositional tract from the Egyptian diaspora into the master narrative of Mesopotamian origins.

[46] See de Pury, Römer (1990, 1992a, 1992b, 1996). In his dissertation (1990), Römer extends the argument of Van Seters that the "ancestors" or "fathers" in the deuteronomistic layer of the Pentateuch and in the Deuteronomistic History are not the patriarchs of Genesis but rather an anonymous collective most often associated with the sojourn in, and the exodus from, Egypt. A later redaction resulting in the formation of the Pentateuch, and the separation of Deuteronomy from the Deuteronomistic History, transformed the deuteronomistic "ancestors" into the patriarchs of Genesis, and the "promise to the ancestors" was established as a leitmotif throughout the Pentateuch. Unlike Van Seters, who saw this process as a reformulation of deuteronomistic tradition by JE during the exile, Römer postulates a P redaction in the Persian period that integrated two concurrent and conflicting origin traditions.

Whereas de Pury (1991) suggests that the mosaic origin tradition becomes dominant in the Pentateuch, demoting the patriarchal tradition to a mere prologue, I would contend that exactly the converse takes place, in that the patriarchal tradition of origins incorporates and subordinates the mosaic tradition of origins into a Pentateuchal master narrative that begins in Mesopotamia and not in Egypt.

[47] Two points on the Persian period context of the production of the Pentateuch need to be noted. First, this context refers to the redaction of the texts into their final text form and is not meant to exclude the possibility that the texts contain far older traditions. However, even if more ancient traditions are contained in the Pentateuchal texts (as they undoubtedly are), it is the final redacted form that is aimed at a particular audience at a particular time and which thus bears the most promise for an ideological rhetorical analysis. Second, I realize that a Persian period date for the final production of the Pentateuch is a contested issue in the scholarly community, and yet seems to be gaining more adherents. It is not possible in the space of this article to present the various arguments for such a date, but see, for example, Römer (1996), Berquist, Blenkinsopp, and Davies (1992).

by Egypt, can inherit the promised land (Numbers 14). The negative depiction of Egypt in the Pentateuch is thus overwhelming.

[27] Yet the Pentateuch also gives voice to an alternative perspective in which Egypt is viewed positively as a place of refuge, of plenty, and of enrichment - an alluring and attractive place. Such a depiction is especially part of the Joseph story, which represents a sort of exodus-in-reverse in that Israel leaves the famine-ridden territory of the Cisjordan in order to enter an Egypt that promises survival, satiation, and even prosperity.[48] These clues of a more positive assessment of Egypt indicate the presence of such a perspective in the traditions that the Pentateuch draws on and among the audience to which it is directed. This perspective, in such opposition to the dominant negative view of Egypt that the Pentateuch seeks to inculcate, could, however, not simply be rejected or delegitimized without alienating parts of the audience which it seeks to persuade. Instead, while at times acknowledging the positive character or associations of Egypt, the Pentateuch fits this positive perspective within its larger master narrative, thus effectively neutralizing a positive view of Egypt by framing it within a more negative view.[49] For example, the plundering motif (Exodus 3:21-22; 11:2-3; 12:35-36) could represent an attempt to fit the positive image of Egypt as a place of enrichment into the more negative frame of the need to separate from Egypt. Or the motif of rebellion in the wilderness (Exodus 16, 17; Numbers 11, 14, 16, 20) arguably represents an attempt to articulate a positive image of Egypt as a place of satiation while simultaneously framing such a voice as one of rebellion against the divine. In the context of the Persian period, one can see in these dynamics the attempt to dissociate Israel from any positive leanings towards Egypt so as to encourage loyalty to the Persian-sanctioned regime in Jerusalem.[50]

[28] That Egypt is negatively portrayed in the dominant perspective of the Pentateuch, and yet that Israel is described as receiving its shape as a distinct people in the same place, is a paradox that leads to a number of ambiguities and contradictions. Legislation that speaks of Israel as native to the land conflicts with the tradition of Israel's origins outside of the promised land,[51] and legislation that speaks of Israel as a sojourner in Egypt conflicts with Israel's experience of

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[48] In the turmoil of the exilic, Persian and early Hellenistic periods, Egypt may very well have seemed to promise inhabitants of Judea at least the possibility of a better life in terms of stability of sustenance. R. H. Smith (124) mentions Koucky's hypothesis of cyclical climatic changes in the Levant, indicating that in the fourth and third centuries B.C.E. the area was experiencing severe hot dry weather; the resulting relative drought would have lessened agricultural production and likely motivated some migration to more agriculturally stable areas like Egypt.

[49] Even though this rhetorical strategy can lead to ambiguity and contradiction within the same text, it is worth the payoff in gaining audience support for the main rhetorical appeal of the text (see Watts and the discussion of audience in note 20).

[50] The Pentateuch is thus primarily directed to a Judean audience, to wean it from any positive associations with Egypt and thus to focus attention on the Jerusalem elite as the locus of authority. The Persians themselves would not be persuaded of a depiction of Egypt as a negative place since their desire to maintain or regain their hold on the country indicates that it was seen as valuable to them; nonetheless, Egypt would be seen by them as an enemy.

[51] For instance, the identification of Israel with both the positions of the land-holding, kin-related native (*ezrakh*) and the landless, unrelated resident alien (*ger*) in the legal stipulations found in Leviticus 16-25, poses an insoluble tension. The status of native implies an origin for Israel indigenous to the promised land whereas the status of resident alien implies an origin outside of the land.

slavery in Egypt.[52] Furthermore, the image of Egypt as an "iron furnace" consists of overlapping negative and positive connotations.[53] It is here that the Pentateuch reveals one of its stress points or fault lines: a total repudiation of Egypt can not be made to fit totally with the tradition of an origin that is at least somehow connected with Egypt. In the Pentateuch, Egypt thus functions not only as embodiment of that which is adverse and must be repulsed, but also as a mark of the anxiety, ambiguity, and contingency of identity itself.

[29] In conclusion, I would argue that the equivocal anti-Egyptian perspective of the Pentateuch's ethnomythography is most effectively contextualized within the period of the production of the Pentateuch's final text form in the Persian period. The history of the Persian empire's troubles in Egypt during this period, the geopolitical location of Yehud on the front between the empire and Egypt, and the presence of Judean colonists in Egypt, all provide a compelling sociopolitical setting for the Pentateuch's anti-Egyptian rhetoric. In the Pentateuch's target audience were those for whom Egypt occupied a positive position, potentially subversive of the interests of the Persian patrons of the elite of Yehud. The Pentateuch seeks to subdue this perspective by inscribing it, through the strategies described above, within a symbolic geography in which Egypt occupies a predominantly negative position. Especially at stake is the origin of Israel; Egypt's essential role in that origin is configured such that it is both necessary and a subsidiary stage which has been superseded and must be rejected. By reading the Pentateuch's ethnomythography "against the grain," one is enabled to discern *under* the Egypt that is portrayed as the rejected "other" in Israel's formative identity, an Egypt that functioned also as a positive point of origin for Israel.

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[52] For example, Deuteronomy frequently describes Egypt as a house of slavery (5:6; 6:12; passim) and the Israelites there as slaves (5:15; 6:21; passim), yet also describes Israel as resident aliens in Egypt (10:19; 23:8 [Eng: 7]); on the basis of the latter, Egyptians are to be given preferential treatment (23:8b-9 [Eng: 7b-8]).

[53] This image, appearing in Deuteronomy 4:20 (and also 1 Kings 8:51 and Jeremiah 11:4) seems at first to be entirely negative, and thus related to the depiction of Egypt as a place of slavery. However, the image also draws on the positive transformative associations of iron producing technology to make Egypt into an indispensable element in the ethnogenesis of Israel.

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