

OGOCHUKWU DANIEL ONUORAH

Social Memory in Ex 16  
and the Identity  
of Exilic/Post-Exilic Israel

*Forschungen*  
*zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe*  
146

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**Mohr Siebeck**

Forschungen zum Alten Testament  
2. Reihe

Edited by

Corinna Körting (Hamburg) · Konrad Schmid (Zürich)  
Mark S. Smith (Princeton) · Andrew Teete (Harvard)

146





Ogochukwu Daniel Onuorah

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Mohr Siebeck

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*Vidimus et approbamus ad normam Statutorum Universitatis*

Roma, Pontificia Università Gregoriana

05/04/2022

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ISBN 978-3-16- 162406-3 / eISBN 978-3-16- 162781-1  
DOI 10.1628/978-3-16- 162781-1

ISSN 1611-4914 / eISSN 2568-8367 (Forschungen zum Alten Testament, 2. Reihe)

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available at <https://dnb.de>.

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The book was printed on non-aging paper, and bound by Gulde-Druck in Tübingen.

Printed in Germany.

## Preface

For a social group to form, a group of individuals must be bound together with the fundamental belief: “We are a group.” Underlying this belief is the conviction of a shared past, continually handed down among the group members in the form of narratives. From these narratives, the members jointly derive the sense of their common past, make meaning of the present, and chart their way to the future. This encapsulates the social memory/identity theory.

From my earliest introduction to the critical study of the Scriptures, especially the OT, I have continually asked fundamental questions on the *when* and *how* of these biblical texts. And I have always been attracted to answers that pay particular attention to life-situations. Hence, it is not quite surprising that the application of the social memory/identity theory to biblical criticism caught my attention. The use of this hermeneutical tool in the study of biblical texts is relatively recent. But I have found it quite relevant in answering my questions.

The social memory theory brings together synchronic and diachronic concerns in the analysis of biblical texts in an interesting way. It studies the extant narrative as the remembered story of the community (group). And because the way the story is remembered is shaped by the current circumstances of the remembering community, this hermeneutical approach pays particular attention to the situation of the remembering people at the relevant period. I am quite convinced that exploring this approach further will bring new vitality to our quest to understand the OT better. As it has not yet taken the centre-stage in biblical criticism, this application of these hermeneutical tools to the study of manna-narrative of Ex 16 is an attempt to bring the merits of this approach to the fore.

This work is the outcome of my doctoral research, presented and defended at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, in March 2022. I remain ever grateful to the moderator of the Thesis, Prof. Fabrizio Ficco and the censor Prof. J.-P. Sonnet for their inputs in sharpening my thoughts. I am also grateful to the other professors who contributed to the success of this enterprise. Worthy of mention here are Profs. Ehud Ben Zvi and Benedetta Rossi. To the other professors and to my colleagues and friends both at the Pontifical Biblical Institute and the Pontifical Gregorian University, I am very grateful. To my Archbishop, Most Rev. Valerian M. Okeke, who sustained my studies all through my sojourn in Rome and to the Archdiocesan Presbyterium Onitsha – Nigeria where I belong, I am most grateful. My family members have always been a pillar of support to me. I owe them a lot of gratitude. Of course, my heartfelt gratitude goes to the editors of *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* for accepting to publish this study.



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## List of Abbreviations

<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament</i> , ed. Pritchard, J.B., Princeton, NJ <sup>3</sup> 1969.
<i>Anth.</i>	<i>Anthropotes. Rivista di Studi sulla Persona e la Famiglia del Pontificio Istituto Tiologico San Giovanni Paolo II</i>
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ASORDS	American Schools of Oriental Research Dissertation Series
ASV	American Standard Version (Bible, 1901)
AThANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AYBC	Anchor Yale Bible Commentary
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeological Review</i>
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BBET	Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie
BDB	Brown, F. / Driver, S.R. / Briggs, C.A., <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , Oxford 1907.
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>Comm.</i>	<i>Communication Journal</i> [published by Gordon Breach Sci Publ Ltd, Duke University Durham, NC]
DBAT	Dielheimer Blätter zum Alten Testament
<i>DOT.Pent</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Old Testament. Pentateuch</i>
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls
EA	El Amarna
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
EDB	Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna
<i>EHLL</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FOTL	Forms of Old Testament Literature
GK	Gesenius, H.F.W., <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> , edited and enlarged by E. Kautzsch, Oxford 1910.
<i>HALOT</i>	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , Baumgartner, W. / Stamm, J.J. / Koehler, L. / Richardson, M.E.J., Leiden 1994–2000.

HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HeBAI	Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel
HebSyn	Brockelmann, C., <i>Hebräische Syntax</i> , Neukirchen 1956.
HSK	Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IDB</i>	<i>Interpreter's Bible Dictionary</i>
IECOT	International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>Interp</i>	<i>Interpretation. A Journal of Bible and Theology</i>
<i>IOS</i>	<i>Israel Oriental Studies</i>
ITC	International Theological Commentary
<i>JANER</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBS	Jerusalem Biblical Studies
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JM	Joüon, P. / Muraoka, T., <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> , Subsidia Biblica 027, Rome 2006.
JBS	Jerusalem Biblical Studies
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>Supplement to the Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
KEHAT	Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
KöSyn	König, E., <i>Historisch-komparative Syntax der hebräischen Sprache</i> , Leipzig 1897.
KöWb	König, E., <i>Hebräisches und aramäisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> , Leipzig 1936.
<i>LaSt</i>	<i>Language and Style</i>
LB-PT	Libri Biblici. Primo Testamento
LHB-OTS	Library of the Hebrew Bible. Old Testament Studies
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
LXX	The Septuagint
<i>Mek.</i>	<i>Mekilta</i> [midrashic compendium on Exodus]
MT	Masoretic Text
MTS	Marburger Theologische Studien
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NAC	New American Commentary
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society [Bible, 1985]
NKJV	New King James Version
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NSK.AT	Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar. Altes Testament
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Oudtestamentische Studiën

PoeT	Poetics Today
<i>QS</i>	<i>Qualitative Sociology</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
RBS	Rhetorica Biblica et Semitica
<i>RL</i>	<i>Religion &amp; Literature</i>
SamP	Samaritan Pentateuch
<i>SB</i>	<i>Stuttgarter Bibelstudien</i>
SBL.ANEM	Society of Biblical Literature. Ancient Near East Monographs
SBL.SCSt	Society of Biblical Literature. Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in late Antiquity
<i>SocT</i>	<i>Sociological Theory</i>
SSWb	Siegfried, C. / Stade, B., <i>Hebräisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> , Leipzig 1893.
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
TB	Theologische Bücherei
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
TG.ST	Tesi Gregoriana. Serie Teologia
<i>ThR</i>	<i>Theologische Revue</i>
TNf	Targum Neofiti I [Palestinian Targum to the Torah]
TO	Targum Onqelos [Literalistic Targum to the Torah]
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TSJTSA	Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America
TTS	Trierer theologische Studien
UT	Ugaritic Texts = GORDON, C.H., <i>Ugaritic Textbook. Grammar, Texts in Transliteration, Cuneiform Selections, Glossary, Indices, Analecta Orientalia</i> 038; Rome 1965.
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZDPV</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
<i>ZKT</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie</i>
<i>ZThK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>





# Introduction

*The writing of history, whether ancient or modern,  
is an act of recollection, and produces what is,  
in form, a collective memory of the past.<sup>1</sup>*

## 1. Interest of the Study

The study of the Pentateuch has elicited keen interest in biblical scholarship right from the rabbinic times. Till date, however, many issues arising therefrom remain unresolved, both from the literary and the historical-critical perspectives. In fact, Zenger deems modern Pentateuchal studies to be evidently stuck in deep crisis.<sup>2</sup> This calls for new approaches in this endeavour, especially inter-disciplinary approaches.<sup>3</sup> Within this state of affairs, the social psychology tools of social memory and social identity have, in the recent past, been applied to biblical scholarship. It is nevertheless to be observed that this approach has not gained prominence in contemporary biblical exegesis.

Reading critically through the Pentateuch, and taking cognisance of the history of Israel, one discovers at the basis of the text the dynamics of social memory and group identity. At the theological level, one finds expressed in these texts the efforts of the Israeli *literati* to present and project the history of YHWH's relationship with Israel as a people, creating through it a religious and ethical model for social existence in Israel. This is demonstrated in this work by the study of Ex 16. This study applies the tools of social memory/identity to the analysis of Ex 16, and argues that this narrative, in its present form, represents the collective memory of the people in the exilic/post-exilic period, and served to reinforce the identity of the people in the face of the crisis of the fall of Jerusalem (and the Temple!) and the consequent Exile.

The "remembered past" narrated in Ex 16 is thus shaped by the current realities of the communal life of the people, meant to resolve existential problems at the theological level. This particular point draws my interest as an Igbo (SE Nigeria) in a special way. In a setting where cultural memory is still highly

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<sup>1</sup> P.R. DAVIES, *Memories of Ancient Israel*, 106.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. E. ZENGER, "Auf der Suche", 353.

<sup>3</sup> A recent example in this direction is the volume: T.E. LEVY / T. SCHNEIDER / W.H.C. PROPP, ed., *Israel's Exodus in Transdisciplinary Perspectives* (2015).

valued, this study demonstrates to me that our existential issues as a people today can be resolved at the theological level by taking recourse to the social memory approach. Again, coming from a background where Christianity is relatively new (just over a hundred years), but where syncretism and relapse into traditional religion is on the rise, this study adjudges the social memory approach a veritable tool to the Church's mission of evangelisation, an approach that would help the Gospel actually take root in different cultures.

To be added here is that this application of the tools of social memory and social identity to the analysis of Ex 16 constitutes an original contribution to biblical scholarship. Again, usually adjudged a composite text, there has not been a detailed narrative-critical study of this chapter of the Pentateuch till now. This study undertakes this task.

## 2. Thesis Argument

It is the argument of this work that the *Manna-Erzählung* of Ex 16 arose out of the people's collective memory of their constitutive past at the exilic/early post-exilic period, in response to the calamity of the fall of Jerusalem and the consequent deportation. This defeat of the "chosen people" had consequences in every facet of the people's life: psychological, sociological and theological. In fact, it put their very existence as a people into jeopardy. Psychologically, their self-esteem as a specially chosen people was ruptured. Sociologically, they faced the risk of losing their identity as a people. And theologically, it seemed their God has been conquered by the gods of the land of the Babylonians, in accordance with the religious worldview of the ANE. To salvage this alarming situation, a swift, decisive action was needed.

Applying the techniques of social memory provided an adequate response to this calamity. By *calling to mind* the great events of the constitutive past, and inserting themselves into the continuum of these mighty acts of the divine, the people of Israel drew strength and inspiration to survive the vicissitudes of the present crisis. They *remembered* the past mighty acts of YHWH not as stories of a distant past, but as narratives that are operative at present. If God remembered "our fathers" outside the land – in Egypt, he will also remember "us" outside the land – in Babylon. And if he punished them for their obstinacy in the wilderness but did not reject them, the present punishment does not imply that he has rejected us.

Recalling the constitutive events of the past thus became a proficient response to the danger of being assimilated into other bigger cultures at this critical period. With this technique, the people were able to preserve their identity at this period of crisis. At the theological level, the fact of being defeated does not imply the impotency of YHWH. It is rather a display of his universal power, for YHWH can use whatever means he chooses to chasten his people

when they transgress, for his a “jealous God” (Ex 20,5; 34,14). But this only constitutes a training – a *Lernprozess*. Ultimately, the Babylonian experience becomes interpreted as designed by YHWH to test them and bring them to a closer knowledge to him. And the *Manna-Erzählung* of Ex 16 reinforces such conviction.

### 3. Methodology

The social memory approach to biblical exegesis entails both synchronic and diachronic inquiries. Thus, this study applies both approaches in analysing the text of Ex 16. Because the social memory theory focuses on the functionality of the past as remembered at present, the analysis of the “present” narrative constitutes the starting point of its inquiry and the basis of its inferences. Hence, this work undertakes a detailed *close reading* of the text of Ex 16 – applying the techniques of narrative analysis which, as Resseguie explains, “focuses on how biblical literature works as *literature*.”<sup>4</sup>

The close-reading of Ex 16 will investigate why the narrator chose to “remember” what is represented in the text to illustrate the social memory of the exilic/post-exilic Israel, and how recalling this event immerses the people into the continuum with a significant past that has an exacting meaning for the present. All the more, this analysis of Ex 16 will entail some critical intra- and intertextual analyses,<sup>5</sup> which will elucidate the imports and functions of some strategic motifs and literary constructions employed therein by the narrator.

And then, in order to examine the impact of the present on the remembered past and the relevance of this past to the people’s current circumstances, a diachronic analysis<sup>6</sup> of our pericope is also necessary. This inquiry will reveal that the collective memory of the manna-event expressed in Ex 16 came as a theological cum psychosocial response to the alarming calamity of the Exile. Also, because the social memory approach is relatively new in biblical scholarship, this study begins with an elucidation of the necessary related terms, and

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<sup>4</sup> J.L. RESSEGUIE, *Narrative Criticism*, 18. On Narrative Criticism in biblical exegesis, see *inter alia* J.P. FOKKELMAN, *Narrative Art in Genesis*; M. STERNBERG, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*; M.A. POWELL, *What is Narrative Criticism*; R. ALTER, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*; S. BAR-EFRAT, *Narrative Art in the Bible*; J.-L. SKA, *Our Fathers Have Told Us*; J.L. RESSEGUIE, *Narrative Criticism*; J.-P. SONNET, “L’analisi narrativa”, 45–85.

<sup>5</sup> On inner biblical exegesis, see *inter alia* M. FISHBANE, “Revelation and Tradition”, 343–361; IDEM, *Biblical Interpretation*; W.C. KAISER, “Inner Biblical Exegesis”, 33–46.

<sup>6</sup> Diachronic (historical-critical) analysis in biblical exegesis encompasses form criticism, source criticism and redaction criticism (these concepts are briefly treated in Chap. I). The diachronic analysis in this work, however, concentrates on the “when” and “why” of the narrative as presented in the Bible.

how they apply to biblical exegesis. And it ends with the application of these tools to the analysis of the *Manna-Erzählung* in Ex 16.

#### 4. *Status Quaestionis*

The *status quaestionis* of this study evolves in two steps, embedded in the unfolding of the study. On the one hand, the studies that have applied the tools of memory studies to Pentateuchal criticism are analysed in Chap. I. This analysis exposes the relevance of this relatively new hermeneutical approach in biblical exegesis. It reveals that social memory performs an important mediatory function in the dialogue between the biblical text and historical-archaeological inquiry, a mediatory role on the argument concerning the “truth value” and the “truth claim” of the biblical text. From this analysis also, the need to apply the devices of this “new” exegetical tool to the analysis of particular narratives is observed. This work constitutes a response in this direction.

On the other hand, the scholarly inquiry into the manna-narrative of Ex 16 is x-rayed in Chap. II. And it is exposed from this excursus that the scholarly discussions on this chapter have mostly been “source-oriented”,<sup>7</sup> but resulting in differing conclusions. This study undertakes also a historical-critical approach, but focuses on unravelling the circumstances that prompted the eminent remembrance of the *מִן הַמַּן מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם*, as represented in the narrative.

#### 5. Presentation of the Study

This work is presented in six chapters, with an introduction and a conclusion. The first chapter exposes certain essential themes, necessary for a good comprehension of the entire work. In the first section of this chapter, the terms – social memory, social identity and narrative identity – are explicated, and their interconnectivity explored. In the second section, the modern scholarly positions on the composition of the Pentateuch are briefly brought into discussion with the social memory approach. And in the third section, the studies that have applied the social memory approach to the study of the Pentateuch are succinctly recapitulated.

The second chapter turns attention to the text of Ex 16, the central pericope of this work. It begins with a textual criticism of Ex 16 and its translation, observing pertinent exegetical issues. Then, complexities arising from the text

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<sup>7</sup> As explained by M. Sternberg (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 15), in contrast with discourse-oriented analysis which sets out to understand “the text itself as a pattern of meaning and effect”, source-oriented inquiry, focuses interest “on some object behind the text... which operated at the time as a source of biblical writing.”

are noted, difficulties for which the majority of scholars adjudge this pericope a “composite text.” An x-ray of the different endeavours in this direction, however, reveals a glaring lack of agreement, suggesting the need for a different approach. The chapter goes on to argue for the literary unity of the text of Ex 16 as a narrative unit, in spite of the difficulties found therein. To ground this argument, the basic tenets of narrative criticism are exposed. Against this backdrop, Ex 16 is then succinctly analysed as a narrative unit – a unified plot with a narrative thread that runs from the beginning to the end.

In the third and fourth chapters of the work, a detailed *close reading* of Ex 16 is undertaken.<sup>8</sup> This analysis, taken according to the episodes in the narrative, exposes in details the dynamics of the narrative plot. The narrative begins with a clear exposition in v. 1 which provides the necessary spatiotemporal background against which the entire story is built. From v. 2, the story of the bread-from-heaven unfolds, evolving gradually in connected episodes with complications and resolutions until the climactic resolution in v. 30 (vv. 2–12: Complaint and promise of food; vv. 13–21: Fulfilment of promise and people’s reaction; vv. 22–30: Sabbath instructions and people’s reaction). It is then concluded by an epilogue which centres on the memorialisation of the food (vv. 32–34), with an explanatory postscript (vv. 35–36). The textual unit presents a general dynamic of *complaint – divine intervention – instructions/people’s reactions – memorialisation*. And the attitude of the people through the narrative reveals a gradual movement from “not knowing” to “knowing” (revelation plot).<sup>9</sup>

In Ex 16, it is instructed that an *omer* of manna is to be preserved לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם (“throughout your generations”), so as to keep the memory of this gracious provision alive in the subsequent generations. Interestingly, this term (לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם) recurs 9x in Exodus in six different contexts, employed in prime moments of the people’s constitutive past to recount the institution of important practices in Israel. The fifth chapter studies the memory-implications of this term in Exodus generally, so as to shed more light on its functionality in the manna-narrative. Employing both the synchronic and the diachronic analytic approaches, this chapter moves to establish that the term became used in the exilic/early post-exilic period as a *formula* that expresses the people’s collective memory of certain institutions which, at a period of crisis, highlight their identity as a chosen people. Also considered here, because of its central importance in marking the *holiness* of Israel, is the most essential object of the wilderness sanctuary – the Ark of the Testimony. The Ark depicts the special presence of God among the Israelites – a vital mark of their *chosenness*.

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<sup>8</sup> To be noted here is that in the course of this detailed *close reading*, the study also finds it opportune to clarify certain concepts that facilitate a better understanding of the text.

<sup>9</sup> On this concept (revelation plot), see J.-P. SONNET, “L’analisi narrativa”, 56–57.

The last chapter examines the functionality of the collective memory of the manna-event in Israel's quest for identity at the exilic/early post-exilic period. It aims at establishing that the manna-narrative of Ex 16 consists in an "integrated and integrative" memory of God's gracious provision of food for *our* ancestors in the wilderness, which functions to provide an identity-reinforcing response to the calamity of the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE and the consequent Exile. The study arrives at this inference by applying the tools of social memory theory. In effect, this chapter ultimately applies the expositions of Chap. I to the *Manna-Erzählung* of Ex 16.

The final chapter also considers the implications of the social memory approach to biblical exegesis for the discourse on the composition of the Pentateuch. On the basis of this approach, it is inferred that as regards the articulation of the Pentateuch as we have it today, the project was eminently theological; the tool was the narrative; and the material was the collective memory of the people at the exilic/immediate post-exilic period. The application of the tools of social memory/identity to the study of the *Manna-Erzählung* in Ex 16, undertaken in this work, attests to this.

## CHAPTER I

# General Expositions

## 1. Social Memory, Social Identity and Narrative Identity

This work studies Exodus 16, using the instance of the *Manna-Erzählung* to demonstrate how the collective memory of the constitutive events of Israel as a nation, as narrated in the Pentateuch, furnished and sustained the identity of the exilic/post-exilic Israel. So as to build on a solid foundation, it is necessary here to clarify these concepts – social memory and social identity – as applied to this work, and to explore succinctly the relationship between them. It is also deemed fit, for the purposes of this work, to illustrate briefly the concept of narrative identity – a term coined by Paul Ricœur – especially as it applies to biblical criticism. This is undertaken as it sheds light on the impact of “history writing,” here specifically the composition of the Pentateuch, on the (re)formation of social identity.

### 1.1 Social Memory

Social (or collective) memory is “the public, integrated, and socially integrative representation of the past that is held, shaped, and negotiated within a social group, and which holds it together.”<sup>1</sup> The social memory theory therefore “examines the ways in which communities and individuals reconstruct and commemorate their pasts in light of shared experiences and current social realities.”<sup>2</sup> In the words of Jan Assmann, the theory of collective memory “draws our attention to the role of the past in constituting our world through dialogue and intercommunication, and it investigates the forms in which the past presents itself to us as well as the motives that prompt our recourse to it.”<sup>3</sup> Contrasting history and memory, Ehud Ben Zvi notes that history (as understood in contemporary discourse)

tends to separate the past from the present and focus on the unique, unrepeatable character of the past or past event.... [Whereas, on the other hand, memory] tends to construe a past that is presently alive in the community, to fuse past and present, and to shape the past in terms of a basic metanarrative/myth that is constantly reused to interpret and provide

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<sup>1</sup> E. BEN ZVI, “The Memory of Abraham”, 4.

<sup>2</sup> A. KIRK / T. THATCHER, ed., *Memory, Tradition and Text*, back-cover.

<sup>3</sup> J. ASSMANN, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, ix.



significance to a recounted past, which accordingly becomes, to some extent, both cyclical and recyclable.<sup>4</sup>

Ben Zvi goes on to clarify that memory studies is characterised by this “fusion of the past and the present,” that is to say, the significance of the present with regard to the held notion of the past. It follows, therefore, that social/collective memory does not imply a passive remembrance of the past. Rather, commemoration in this sense is “an intensively signifying and hermeneutic activity, which strives to fix the meaning and purpose of the past. It is an attempt to counteract the danger of rupture and disconnect between the community and the past.”<sup>5</sup> For him, therefore, social memories are results of coherence-bestowing activities.

Every society distinguishes certain events of its past as possessing constitutive significance. And these memories become fashioned into the society’s “master commemorative narrative.” As Alan Kirk points out, “through recitation of this master narrative, a group continually reconstitutes itself as a coherent community, and as it moves forward through its history, it aligns its fresh experiences with this master narrative.”<sup>6</sup> When a social group ceases to collectively remember, it ceases to exist as a group. In fact, as J. Assmann importantly observes, the disappearance of an ethnic group is not a matter of physical annihilation but of collective and cultural forgetting<sup>7</sup>. It is important to re-emphasise here that these master commemorative narratives that have become statutorily accepted in the collective memory of the people “are not inert, museum-piece representations of the past; rather, they vitally shape perception and organization of reality. They are cognitive schemata... for interpreting and processing streams of experience.”<sup>8</sup>

### 1.1.1 *The Selective Nature of Memory*

Social memory is essentially selective, continually shaped by the vicissitudes of the present. This is to say, memory is a continuous process of remembering and forgetting. The past is thus not a fixed, given reality. It is rather a collective reconstruction. It does not survive in itself, but continually reconstructed, in

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<sup>4</sup> E. BEN ZVI, “The Voice and Role”, 172. Also, Davies adds here that modern history “lacks the persuasive and emotional power of cultural memory in providing existential meaning, reinforcing identity and values, and illuminating trajectories towards the future.” P.R. DAVIES, *Memories of Ancient Israel*, 110.

<sup>5</sup> K. BERGE, “Sites of Memory”, 288–289; See also A. KIRK, “Social and Cultural Memory”, 7; P.R. DAVIES, *Memories of Ancient Israel*, 106–107.

<sup>6</sup> A. KIRK, “Social and Cultural Memory”, 5; Cf. Y. ZERUBAVEL, *Recovered Roots*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> J. ASSMANN, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, 140.

<sup>8</sup> A. KIRK, “Social and Cultural Memory”, 15. Hence, as articulated by P.R. Davies (*Memories of Ancient Israel*, 110), “the purpose of cultural memory is precisely not to record, but to remember, with everything that the act of remembering entails.”

response to the situation at present.<sup>1</sup> This continuous shaping and reshaping of social memory in the history of a group necessarily entails a continuous process of “remembering” and “forgetting.” Remembering/forgetting here implies “pushing other things into the background, making distinctions, obliterating many things in order to shed light on others.”<sup>2</sup>

What is “remembered” or “forgotten” by the group at each period in history is largely determined by the current circumstances of that period. Here, Ron Hendel observes that “in the work of remaking the past to suit the exigencies of the present, narrative details can be surprisingly fluid.”<sup>3</sup> The inherited contents of collective memory are re-examined and updated. This implies, as explained above, that while some important details are pushed forward to the forefront, others are pushed backwards. They become suppressed or forgotten.<sup>4</sup> An outstanding example here is the moment of communal crisis. In crisis situations, Hendel aptly points out, cultural memories are radically reformulated and rehearsed to face the challenges of the present circumstances. Crisis unavoidably leads to modifications of cultural ethos and boundaries, and generates the circumstances for the creation of new cultural syntheses. As such, when the present appears muddled up, reformulated cultural memories supply the models to surmount the incongruity. They supply “an intelligible model for thought and action” when the old models appear functionally inadequate.<sup>5</sup>

The adjustment of cultural memory is therefore important for the continued existence of the group as such, and particularly in crisis moments.<sup>6</sup> That this applies to Israel/Judah after the fall of Jerusalem and the consequent exile goes without saying. Such collective trauma created the need for the people to re-examine and update the inherited contents of their cultural memory, and this has a lot of implications for the Hebrew Bible as we have it today. Jean-Pierre Sonnet, for instance, correlates the concept of election that pervades the Hebrew Bible with Israel’s traumatic experience of destruction-and-survival at the time of Exile. In the midst of this crisis, Israel dramatises its “chosenness”

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<sup>1</sup> M. HALBWACHS, *On Collective Memory*, 189.

<sup>2</sup> J. ASSMANN, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> R. HENDEL, “Remembering the Exodus”, 330.

<sup>4</sup> This position appears contradicted by what J.-L. Ska (*Introduction*, 169) terms the “law of conservation” as regards ancient traditions: “Ancient society is fundamentally conservative. Indeed, nothing is eliminated; everything is preserved and interpreted.” But Ska also admits in the same text (*Introduction*, 171): “Although the ancient world was conservative, it also preserved only the things that had value for the present time.”

<sup>5</sup> R. HENDEL, “Remembering the Exodus”, 331; see also P.R. DAVIES, *Memories of Ancient Israel*, 112–113.

<sup>6</sup> Hendel notes here: “The revision of cultural memory in times of crisis is a strategy of survival [...] The resilience of a culture is tied to its cultural memory. The past must change so that the group can survive the vicissitudes of the present.” R. HENDEL, “Remembering the Exodus”, 330.

– its status as YHWH’s chosen people, and the figures of the fathers in the Pentateuch becomes a “screen memory” for the people to create the required positive mindset to survive the present real crisis.<sup>7</sup>

The revision of mindsets in moments of crisis does not imply its denial. It is rather a conscious action that accepts the present condition, which also empowers the mind to reinterpret it in such a way to be able to pull through it. In this regard, Sonnet asserts that, rather than being repressed, “the experience of the exile has thus been internalized in the Pentateuch, and this points to the depth of Israel’s answer to its most dramatic trauma.”<sup>8</sup> This “answer” codified in the Pentateuch, was meant primarily to protect and retain Israel’s identity as a people – God’s chosen people.

### 1.1.2 Memory and Commemoration

In order to “remember” the constitutive elements of the past, the society sets up certain mechanisms to continuously remind its members of such, and to hand down this memory to new members of the society. Along this line, Jeffrey Olick points out that “genuine communities are communities of memory that constantly tell and retell their constitutive memories.”<sup>9</sup> This is the role of rituals. The recitation of the Exodus narrative during the Passover meal – the *Seder* – presents a good example here. It is an established sociological fact that familiarising new members with its past is an important part of a community’s effort to incorporate them.<sup>10</sup> This is exactly the goal of the commemorative narratives at the Passover *Seder*.

Communication and Commemoration are important features of social memory. Maurice Halbwachs points out that memory is a socially-conditioned phenomenon. “No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections.”<sup>11</sup> For him, memory can only be fashioned during the process of socialisation, and collective memory is dependent on its bearers who pass it down from one generation to the next.<sup>12</sup> Jan Assmann goes a step further, however, to point out a period of transition between two phases of collective memory in the historical progression of a group. The first phase – *communicative memory* – is characterised by the face-to-face circulation of foundational memories which are shared among those who experienced the originating events. This type of memory, however, cannot sustain remembrances for a long time after these events. This limitation necessitates, in the evolving community, the emergence of a second

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. J.-P. SONNET, “Writing the Disaster”, 353–354.

<sup>8</sup> J.-P. SONNET, “Writing the Disaster”, 355.

<sup>9</sup> J.K. OLICK, “Collective Memory”, 344.

<sup>10</sup> See E. ZERUBAVEL, “Social Memories”, 290.

<sup>11</sup> M. HALBWACHS, *On Collective Memory*, 43.

<sup>12</sup> M. HALBWACHS, *On Collective Memory*, 59.

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