Original Article

Pollution–purification rituals, cultural memory and the evolution of religion: How collective trauma shaped ancient Israel

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Abstract Can a cultural memory and identity constructed around traumatic events in the historical past, interpreted as the result of pollution of the sacred center, give a group an evolutionary advantage under the right conditions? This article assesses this question by examining three different waves of religious entrepreneurship that drove the evolution of the ancient Israelite religion between the late eighth and sixth centuries BCE. Bringing Alexander's cultural sociology, specifically his theory of trauma and pollution–purification rituals, into dialog with evolutionary sociology, I offer a robust theory of religious evolution. Most work in this area focuses on the evolution of monotheism or the portability of texts, whereas I argue that (i) the specific historical and sociocultural conditions (ii) shaped the specific content of the texts and (iii) the criteria employed in selecting some traditions and not others. Of equal importance, (iv) normative innovations related to interpreting and editing the texts made the Word of God fixed and rigid, yet malleable across a wide swath of milieus. Moreover, (v) annual, weekly and daily rituals meant to inscribe the pollution–purification narrative contributed to the adaptive success of the Israelite cultural assemblage over the course of two millennia.
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Introduction

Besides the Jews, no religious group has survived long without being in control of territory and having political autonomy as a means of protection from external threat. The unique nature of the Jewish case has long piqued the

interest of scholars across many disciplines. The most common answer to their adaptability has been the portability of the Hebrew Bible and the laws contained within (Bellah, 2011). Portable texts, however, existed long before the Jews invented their own, which weakens this explanation's ability to explain Judaism's survival. Other evolutionary theories favor transcendental monotheism, or the differentiation of the mundane and transmundane worlds and the creation of a singular deity, as an answer to the puzzle (Eisenstadt, 1986, 1992, 2004). Yet, monotheism was invented *after* several extinction episodes – that is, moments when a group and its cultural assemblage face threats capable of erasing them from history – and monotheism clearly did not protect converts to Christianity. As recent psychological theories that have adopted the monotheism explanation demonstrate, there is a tendency toward tautological explanations: 'big gods' evolved because there was a need for them (Kirkpatrick, 2005; Norenzayan, 2013).

The lack of theories that can adequately explain the survival of the Israelite religion is a specific case of a much larger problem. In general, scholars do not have a good explanation for religious evolution and survival: often theories are too abstract to capture the twisting, multilinear path sociocultural evolution generally takes (Steward, 1972 [1955]), and they lack the flexibility to flesh out the *discontinuities* that play as important a role as continuities in a religion's history. Ultimately, these theories often look at the outcome and then search for the need it met, rather than examining the actual evolutionary processes in which real groups with real interests under real historical and sociocultural pressures made decisions.

This article offers a new solution. To construct a more robust evolutionary theory, I bring advances in cultural sociology into dialog with theories that favor group-level selection (Turner and Maryanski, 2009; Bowles and Gintis, 2011; Abrutyn, 2013, 2014a; Richerson and Christiansen, 2013). That is, some types of sociocultural evolution works on groups, or what are called *institutional entrepreneurs* (Eisenstadt, 1964), as they are the unit of adaptation. Groups' cultural assemblages either prove fit in the face of threat or they innovate symbolically, normatively and organizationally (Abrutyn, 2014b). In many cases, groups under threat are absorbed into an 'alien' culture. In short, the evolutionary process consists of three elements: (i) historical and sociocultural contingencies facilitating and constraining possibilities (Turner, 2010); (ii) institutional entrepreneurs who serve as the closest analog to biological mutations, but capable of intentional action (Eisenstadt, 1964; Abrutyn, 2014b); and (iii) the degree to which the cultural assemblage encourages solidarity (even in the face of assimilation) (Wilson, 2002) yet retains a degree of flexibility in the face of exogenous or endogenous change. This model pushes us to consider more concretely the types of selection pressures entrepreneurs face, and the *cultural* (as well as material and technological) innovations they develop to adapt to these pressures.

By turning to the insights of cultural sociology, especially Alexander's (1988, 2004a, b) theories on performance, trauma and pollution–purification rituals,

the weaknesses in most evolutionary models can be addressed. I offer a new framework for studying religious evolution by considering contingency, the role creativity and meaning-construction play, and the underlying motives and interests shaping entrepreneurship. The core of this article asks the question: Can a cultural memory and identity founded on historically real traumatic events, which were interpreted as the consequence of a polluted center, prove evolutionarily advantageous under the right circumstances? To assess this question, I draw from general sociological principles and current biblical scholarship. Rather than generalize about transcendental monotheism and new institutional frameworks (Eisenstadt, 1992, 2004) or portable texts (Bellah, 2011), I identify the period in which punctuated, religious evolution occurred, look closely at the entrepreneurs responsible for innovation, and elucidate the symbolic, normative and organizational innovations focusing on why they were and, importantly, are adaptive. I argue that the late eighth century BCE saw a period of rapid evolution in the kingdom of Judah that lasted until the sixth century BCE, and the historical and sociocultural conditions of this era shaped the content of Judaic texts and the selection criteria the Israelite literati employed in retaining some traditions and texts while omitting others.

I examine two other aspects generally overlooked by evolutionary theories. A key normative innovation that became a hallmark of the Jewish religion emerged in the seventh century BCE, when hermeneutical methods (Levinson, 1997), or *mnemotechniques* (Olick, 2008; Assmann, 2011), were invented. It was not writing, *per se*, that mattered, but the norms surrounding the reinterpretation, editing and glossing of texts that proved truly adaptive in Diasporic conditions. On the one hand, the text and law became a rigid, stable center; on the other, these methods and techniques afforded tremendous flexibility to each Jewish community so that they might adapt to their local milieus without losing the core aspects of the cultural assemblage. While these techniques certainly proved adaptive to the elite who had the time and resources necessary to ponder metaphysical questions, the laity required more pragmatic solutions. Drawing from Alexander's (2004a) work on cultural pragmatics and general principles derived from ritual theory (Durkheim, 1995 [1915]; Collins, 2004), I examine how the elites inscribed cultural memory into the community's everyday routines by imposing daily, weekly and annual purification rituals. These rituals made explicit and implicit pollution from the alien culture a real and constant danger, while also making purification a commandment and a true shield against the outside. This resulted in a strongly solidarious community, anchored socioemotionally and morally to a multilayered center that had to be protected. In Diaspora, this solution became self-fulfilling: these rituals became both cause and consequence of threats from the host culture, thus validating the fears embedded in the rituals. In the following section, I expand on theoretical, methodological and historical issues before turning to analysis of the time period of interest.

Intersections of Theory, History and Methods

Jews make up less than 0.2 per cent of the world's population and comprise about 2 per cent of the US population. They have survived all manner of threats, including the destruction of Jerusalem and their holiest space, the Temple, twice (587 BCE and 70 CE); two Diasporas, one of which continues for more than half the world's Jewish population today; non-violent and violent conversion campaigns by its descendant religions, Christianity and Islam; and several state-organized efforts to eradicate them – for example, Russian pogroms and the Holocaust. Yet, Jews continue to persist as a group with a truly shared sense of history and, less so today, destiny. At the heart of Jewish culture is a series of prohibitions against intersocietal contact, made real in negative and positive rituals meant to avoid pollution from 'alien' cultures and maintain purity. Jews are not simply compelled to avoid pollution, they are commanded to continually cleanse themselves. The following examples illustrate this commandment.

Eight days after birth, every Jewish boy is circumcised as a symbolic sign of the covenant Jews made with Yahweh at Mt. Sinai. The Jewish philosopher Philo (20 BC–50 CE) posited six other reasons for circumcision: the first two involve purification and cleanliness. The Kashrut, or dietary laws, presents a second example. Many American Jews likely recall asking a parent or grandparent why they do not eat pork, and then receiving the (empirically incorrect) response that pigs are dirty creatures. So effective were these pollution prohibitions that they were the first *Halakhah* (Jewish laws) Paul dispensed with in his effort to convert Hellenistic Jews to early Christianity (Stark, 2006). Other examples of the central role of pollution and purification in Judaism abound: when reading the Torah in synagogue, one must never touch it with one's fingers but must use a *yad* (Torah pointer), so as not to harm the scroll. Jews are prohibited from tattooing their bodies, as the body is a 'temple' and is on 'loan' from Yahweh. A tattoo prevents burial in most orthodox cemeteries, and when allowed, leads to burial in the most marginal spots on the grounds.

The most important example of these commandments revolves around intermarriage. Besides the threat that intermarriage poses to the viability of a tiny Jewish community, the prohibition was constructed against the backdrop of a pollution–purification narrative. In the Hebrew Bible, intermarriage is often associated with disastrous historical consequences (for example, Ahab and Jezebel). The prophets and priests often interpreted these consequences as due to the syncretic polytheism intermarriage invites. Setting aside the religious embellishment of these stories, the fear of absorption into an alien community is rooted in a fear of being polluted as experienced by the Biblical writers. Although a religiously refracted interpretation, the fear is justified. Up until the 1970s, when American Jews were just beginning to experience occupational and residential mobility, their intermarriage rate remained below 20 per cent. Today, the rate is above 50 per cent. Not only does this constitute a demographic dilemma, as

American Jews tend to reproduce at a replacement rate, but it also has religious implications as only one-third of interfaith Jewish couples raise their children solely Jewish. Intermarriage today, as in the time of King Ahab, threatens the purity of the Jewish family and community by inviting other 'gods' into a Jewish space.

To better understand these commandments, it is imperative to ask, more generally, why pollution matters. In doing so, we can get at the roots of the meaning structure of contemporary Jewish pollution–purification narratives and examine why they have persisted.

Why pollution matters

All groups have centers, or cores, that act as a ' "center of gravity" [and which consist] of beliefs about the history and nature of the [group,] its relationship to certain ideal or transcendent entities or values, it[s] origin and destiny' (Shils, 1975, pp. 36–37). Most of the time, the center is unproblematic: routine, mundane behavior obscures the sacredness of the core. Inappropriate actions are simply labeled deviant, and extant mechanisms of social control are used to sanction this behavior. As Alexander's (1988) creative analysis of the Watergate scandal demonstrated, the center can be 'sacralized' when cultural entrepreneurs relabel deviant behavior as polluting and a grave threat to a group's cultural identity and its most cherished values.

Alexander shows that the Watergate break-in was understood as deviant behavior. As the scandal grew closer to Nixon, and a cover-up became evident, the behavior took on new meaning. The president, as the ultimate symbol of American values and the center, was caught violating cherished principles, and thus the center was polluted. This reframing, however, required the efforts of entrepreneurs to push their narrative *vis-à-vis* the counter-narrative of mundane deviance. Consequently, Americans who came to interpret the event as polluting saw not only the social center, but also their own identity, part of which was embedded in American-ness, as threatened. The demand for purification rituals – for example, publicized trials – reached a crescendo and the center 'had' to be cleansed. In the cleansing process, the existential threat was transformed into a temporary source of solidarity among individuals who 'participated' in the purification rituals. Put differently, participation in or observation of rituals acted as 'conveyer belts' that made the sacred center accessible, eliciting collective effervescence that anchored people to each other, real groups and the larger, abstract social system (Collins, 2004; Lawler, 2006). People were immersed in the collective conscience of the group and reaffirmed its 'group-ness'.

Alexander never goes beyond the temporal limits of Watergate, yet its impact remains etched in the American cultural memory, as evinced by the number of pseudo '-gates' that have appeared since the 1970s. It is plausible, then, to suggest that a pollution narrative, rooted in historical or mythic events, could become inscribed in a religious group's cultural memory and, under the right conditions,

prove adaptive across a wide swath of settings over a much longer time frame. Its effects would be similar to the Watergate case, but more intense in its production of solidarity: the cultural memory would stretch not only to communicated and historical times but also to mythic times.[1] The question, then, is whether the Jewish fear of pollution has roots in cultural memory?

Mnemohistoriography

Groups have cultural memories, and cultural memories always have beginnings or charter narratives that identify the moment in which the group came into being (Connerton, 1989). Jewish cultural memory begins with enslavement, liberation, apostasy and covenant (Smith, 1997; Hendel, 2005); that is, it begins with the Exodus narrative.[2] At the heart of that narrative is a pollution-need-for-purification story: 'The journey away from Egypt becomes the equivalent of the journey away from a profane, impure, oppressive, assimilatory, godless environment' (Assmann, 2011, p. 184). The journey, however, is not a straight, smooth path. For 40 years, the Jews wander in the desert, grumbling and thankless (Ex. 1–18). Yahweh calls Moses up to Mt. Sinai and gives him the law (Ex. 24); upon coming down, he tells the people what Yahweh said (24.3), writes it down (24.4), reads it again (24.7) and ritually sealed the covenant (24.8). Afterward, Moses returns to Mt. Sinai to receive more instructions (Ex. 24–31), but when he returns to tell the people, he finds they have cast an idol, a golden calf. In the seventh century BCE, this would have been understood as an icon associated with the Canaanite god, Ba'al (Ex. 32–34). Yahweh's ire is raised, and he threatens to wipe out the people. Moses pleads with Yahweh to give them a second chance; Yahweh proceeds to inscribe a new set of tablets with his own finger (31.18) and renew the covenant with his people.

The underlying moral of the story is as follows: Yahweh chose the Israelites to be his people, which meant he will give them land, prosperity and make them a light unto all other nations. The most important thing he asks of them, as illustrated in the first commandment and the holiest of Jewish prayers, the *shema*, is zealous henotheism – that is, the sole worship of him, regardless of whether

[1] Communicated memory is transmitted intergenerationally from those who experienced an event. Once those individuals pass away, these memories become historical in the sense that the experiential aspects fade, and some aspects of the memory are selected and merged with the larger collective memory, while others are omitted. Over time, the historical and mythical become inextricably linked as some aspects are forgotten, others embellished, and some become deeply embedded in the collective's identity and, therefore, sacred.

[2] Cultural memory is rarely 'objective' memory. Mnemohistory is history that is consciously and unconsciously selected and arranged into a seemingly coherent narrative about a people and their identity. There is no evidence supporting the Moses–Exodus narrative, but objectivity is not important in foundational myths. What matters is the acceptance that this story is the foundational moment of the Jewish people.

there are other gods. In a sense, the people are 'married' to Yahweh and adultery is strictly prohibited, lest the religious center be polluted, leading to horrific consequences. 'Pollution – moral or cultic – *stains the fabric* of the environment. Human justice is specific, like a sort of spot-remover; divine wrath is general, fire among the flax' (Halpern, 1991, p. 12). To avoid the total annihilation of the people at Yahweh's hands, religious entrepreneurs sought mundane mechanisms of social control that continually cleansed the sacred center and prevented pollution.

The pollution–purification narrative can be found throughout the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, the Bible's overarching theme is one of *forgetting* and the need for remembrance. Throughout the Bible, stories abound that indicate 'the entire system of worship that had been flourishing [at one time or another] was precisely what the Lord had condemned as an *abomination*' at the foundational moment of Israel's construction (Assmann, 2011, p. 203, emphasis added). This narrative is most pronounced in the Prophetic tradition. Parallels to Alexander's Watergate analysis are found throughout the historical books of the Hebrew Bible beginning with Samuel's hesitation in electing a king at the behest of the people (1 Sam. 1.7-8). For instance, prophets harshly criticize the northern Israelite kings, especially the Omride dynasty, for foreign alliances that bring about intermarriages and apostasy (cf. 1 Kg. 16.23–2 Kg. 13.25). Intermarriage became a preoccupation of the prophets, many of whom used adultery imagery – Jews were Yahweh's 'wife' – to describe the people's violation of the covenant with Yahweh (Hos. 2.2–23; Jeremiah 3; Ezek. 16). Even the judgment cast against sinful southern Judean kings, like Manasseh, echoes the pollution narrative imposed on the northern kingdom (2 Kgs. 2–16). Yet, the prophets were not the architects of the Bible (Schniedewind, 2004; Edelman, 2009), and many scholars cast doubt on whether the figures responsible for the eponymous books were even real (Davies, 2000; Noll, 2013). In any case, the books are self-conscious constructions consisting of purposefully selected oracles, edited and redacted over several centuries. The question we turn to, then, is how do we use the Bible as evidence to discern which entrepreneurs were responsible for inscribing and transmitting the pollution–purification narrative?

Using the Bible

Why was the Bible written? While there is no consensus concerning when the Bible was 'written', who wrote it and how accurate it is (van der Toorn, 2007; Davies, 2008; Ben Zvi, 2009; Noll, 2013), nearly all biblical scholars acknowledge that the finished version is not a historical account that apolitically recounts the history of the Jewish people. Instead, based on its writers' contemporary experiences, the Bible was intended to construct a collective identity and memory (Connerton, 1989) and is thus what Assmann (2011) calls a 'mnemohistory'.

To understand why the Bible was written requires knowing when it was written. Answers to this question are subject to rapid change, just like any science that employs archeology. Some researchers, for instance, push the writing of the text further and further into the first millennium BCE, arguing that the text is largely a fictionalized account employed by Hellenistic Jews as a safe means of critiquing their Persian or Greek overlords (Davies, 2000; Lipschits and Oeming, 2006). As Gottwald (2001), among others, argues, it seems a stretch to date the origination of the texts so late: how did the traditions survive several centuries and several extinction episodes if there were no carriers invested in them and motivated to retain them (albeit, continually adapting them to new circumstances)? Instead, these later eras of Judaic history were likely periods of 'retrenchment' in the process of written traditions (Schniedewind, 2004).[3]

We can also discount several earlier periods. The pre-monarchical period, suggested in Exodus and Judges, is an unlikely candidate for religio-cultural entrepreneurship because there is a dearth of evidence for such an account (Finkelstein, 2013). Another candidate, that they were written during the unified monarchy (Saul–David–Solomon), is inconsistent with archeological evidence suggesting these embellished kingdoms were part of the royal project driven by Hezekiah (722–686) and later Josiah (640–609) (Finkelstein and Silberman, 2006). A third candidate is the ninth century BCE after the unified monarchy had split in half, and when a scribal class most likely appeared in the northern kingdom of Israel. The north had reached a level of political complexity that would have required writing for administration, diplomacy and law. Archeological finds raise doubts about this period being one of intensive, radical scribalism as there is a dearth of evidence compared with the eighth century BCE. Moreover, the Bible itself does not speak of 'writers' until Amos and Hosea who both appear in the eighth century BCE. While these scribes were the antecedents of the entrepreneurs we are interested in, they likely mirrored other Near Eastern scribes in function and characteristics and did not innovate (Machinist, 1986).

It is far more likely that the fall of Israel was a turning point, historically and socioculturally, that conditioned the rise of religious entrepreneurs motivated to radically innovate. In the following sections, building on recent evidence in biblical scholarship and archeological research, I emphasize the period beginning in the late eighth century BCE and lasting until the sixth century BCE. I show that during this period, three different waves of entrepreneurs appeared. Each wave built on the earlier waves' innovations, making some aspects of the Israelite 'project' continuous. However, discontinuities in projects rerouted the

[3] As an important aside, it should be clear that there is little consensus in biblical scholarship, but for the interested reader, there are far more expansive discussions of using the Bible as data (cf. Liverani, 2005; van der Toorn, 2007). Many aspects can be triangulated through extra-biblical data.

evolutionary trajectory: each entrepreneurial project was disrupted by outside events, a contingency that prevented crystallization and came to provide the carriers of the religion flexibility.

I also show that this period marks an important moment of 'punctuated' or rapid evolution (Abrutyn and Lawrence, 2010). Entrepreneurship is predicated on cultural trauma, or events that make a 'collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways' (Alexander, 2004b, p. 1). Trauma compels entrepreneurship through the construction of narratives that (i) identify the nature of the pain and (ii) the victim, while also (iii) establishing the victim's relationship to the wider audience to whom the narrative is articulated and (iv) attributing responsibility (ibid, pp. 13–15). The Israelite entrepreneurs, as I showed, interpreted their traumas through a pollution narrative. This narrative became the core framework and motivating force undergirding the evolution of the Israelite religion and contemporary Judaism's adaptive success. The pollution narrative became the basis for symbolic innovation (centralization of the Exodus charter myth), in addition to normative (for example, hermeneutic techniques for reinterpreting traditions without losing authority) and organizational innovations (re-centering the religious sphere). Through ritual innovation, this narrative was made real for contemporary participants, as each 'celebration is linked to its predecessor [which] not only repeats the ceremony of the previous year by following the same ritual but also re-presents … an event from a far more remote past' (Assmann, 2011, p. 3).

There are three advantages to incorporating cultural sociological and evolutionary theory. Emphasizing the roles of entrepreneurs, and how they are constrained, provides a more concrete account of religious evolution and leads to rich and robust sociological explanations, in contrast to functionalist accounts, which are often overly abstract, and mechanistic accounts, which are vague or discount process (for example, Eisenstadt, 1964). Especially in the case of evolution in Jewish culture, this account is consistent with critical biblical scholarship generally ignored by sociologists (Weber, 1952 [1917–19]; Eisenstadt, 1992, 2004; Bellah, 2011). This focus on entrepreneurs also contributes to biblical scholarship, which already uses sociological tools – for example, research considering the politics and status group competitions that shaped the Bible (Smith, 1987 [1971]; Lang, 1983; Blenkinsopp, 1995) or the hermeneutics and logic behind the innovative biblical scribes (Levinson, 1997; Schniedewind, 2004; van der Toorn, 2007) – and archeological work that employs general sociological principles of political and religious evolution (Finkelstein, 2001, 2013; Gottwald, 2001). Indeed, the framework offered here provides a different take on the events that shaped Judaism, while also making connections that often go unnoticed by scholars primarily interested in understanding the biblical narrative and the chronology of its construction.

The Anatomy of a Pollution–Purification Narrative

The foundational mythos

In 723 BCE, the northern kingdom of Israel was bigger, more cosmopolitan and more advanced culturally, economically, politically and militarily than her southern sister, Judah (Finkelstein, 2001, 2013). Although Judah made efforts to enter the global (Assyrian) economy in the 730s, it was physically constrained by its neighbors and a political backwater. In 722, all of this was reversed. Assyria laid waste to Israel. 'It was not enough for the [Assyrians] to raze every sign of human habitation to the ground', they also 'disinterred the dead and denuded the earth by removing topsoil, loading it on to carts and taking it back home' (Jonker, 1995, pp. 47–48). In short, Assyrian policy meant 'to eradicate any traces of the memory of their opponents' (ibid, p. 48). Archeology confirms that refugees swelled the northern hill country of Jerusalem, which was no more than a few miles from Schechem, the southernmost province of Israel. Judah's population doubled or tripled. Israel no longer served as an ecological barrier between Judah and Assyria, and the destruction of its neighbor – a neighbor, incidentally, that shared some cultural traditions – must have served as an existential threat. Selection pressures for integration, regulation and legitimation would have intensified, as controlling the new population, coordinating a division of labor, distributing resources and resolving internal conflicts would quickly have become salient problems (Abrutyn and Lawrence, 2010).

This trauma and pressure would have been coupled with great opportunities. Judah, or some of its inhabitants, clearly experienced economic prosperity in the spice, oil and wine trade (Gottwald, 2001). In addition, political exigencies offer ambitious entrepreneurs structural holes to exploit (Abrutyn, 2014b), and King Hezekiah appears to have taken full advantage, as we are told he instituted several reforms (2 Kgs. 18.17–35). These reforms, however, had unintended consequences: they provoked the Assyrian king Sennacherib, who set northern Judah and western Shephelah on fire, sending even more refugees into an even smaller space. By the time Sennacherib attacked (and failed to capture) Jerusalem in 701, the capital of Judah had grown from a hillside town to a city of 60 hectares (Liverani, 2005; Finkelstein, 2013). If ever there was a case of punctuated political evolution (Abrutyn and Lawrence, 2010), Judah represented it: in two decades, the population doubled, urbanization was forced upon the majority of the population and the economy industrialized as the capital became the center of Judean gravity (Schniedewind, 2004).

Legibility

We can deduce several sociological facts from these events. First, Hezekiah would have been under enormous pressure to deal with a series of pragmatic problems that demanded a level of political complexity previously absent in the south.

Second, he would have needed an ideological base of legitimacy to justify his claims to authority and new organizational innovations. This pressure would surely come from the indigenous Judean population, which was accustomed to local, kinship control, as well as the foreign Israelite population, many of whom saw themselves as culturally superior. Third, a homogeneous population would have become heterogeneous overnight, and new integrative problems would demand new mechanisms. Fourth, Hezekiah would have needed a scribal class to implement any solutions he and his court devised, but given the size of Judah before the fall of Israel, it is difficult to imagine an indigenous scribal class large enough or skilled enough to deal with the confluence of new economic, geopolitical, cultural, religious and legal exigencies. In short, Judah was burdened with a series of practical and metaphysical dilemmas and, concomitantly, infinite possibilities. The north, which had not only been superior to the south, but was also hostile more often than not, had disappeared, never to return again.

It was within these intersecting conditions that the Israelite project began. Biblical scholars typically overlook the dearth of possible scribes in Judah, but we are on firm ground theorizing that (i) a significant pool of human capital came from the north, most likely from Shechem and Bethel,[4] its center of administration and cult (Schniedewind, 2004); (ii) the scribes would have carried traditions known to the Judeans (Na'aman, 2002; Edelman, 2009), including official sources later used for Kings, the Saul–Samuel narrative, the Elijah–Elisha cycle and the Amos–Hosea traditions (Römer and de Pury, 2000; Finkelstein, 2013); (iii) some of these traditions would have been oral, but given the level of political complexity in the north, it is not a stretch to suggest many were written; and finally, (iv) intellectuals from Bethel likely carried a henotheistic view of the supernatural that connected Yahweh (and possibly his female consort Asherah) with the Israelite people (Dever, 2005). Archeological evidence from Kuntillet 'Ajrud, a way station on a well-trodden pilgrimage path, indicates that by the middle eighth century BCE, the Canaanite god El was being integrated with the Edomite god Yahweh, with Yahweh having taken El's wife (Asherah) as his own (Smith, 2002; Finkelstein, 2013, pp. 148–149).[5]

All political projects include a search for beginnings, as entrepreneurs use their 'knowledge of the past in a direct and active way [basing their] behavior and decisions … on an investigation of the past' (Connerton, 1989, pp. 17–18). Hezekiah needed a charter myth and human capital to help implement his goals, and the northern scribes needed material support to pursue their own interests, one of which coincided with Hezekiah's: interpreting the collectively experienced trauma of dislocation, destruction and existential threat. It is no surprise, then,

[4] A distance scholars believe to be no more than 15 miles from Jerusalem.

[5] Asherah would remain popular among the lower classes in Judah until at least the exile, but textual exegesis suggests her integration into Yahweh, and the banning of symbols (asherim) associated with her cult occurred during the seventh century BCE amid the Dueteronomistic reforms (Lutzky, 1998).

that Hezekiah is the first king mentioned as commissioning the compilation of texts (Prov. 25.1); it is probable he sought to legitimate his rule and to raise Judah above Israel through the construction of a king's list and the usurpation of a special relationship to Yahweh. As evidence of northern influence, we are told Isaiah was Hezekiah's counsel (2 Kgs.18.7; Isa. 37.1–7), and the first Isaiah (Chapters 1–39) was clearly influenced by the northern Amos–Hosea traditions, as witnessed in their nearly identical superscriptions, content and style (Halpern, 1991; Blenkinsopp, 1995). Whether there were individual prophets or not is beside the point (cf. Noll, 2013): some group of northern intellectuals carried the Elijah/Elisha cycle and Amos–Hosea traditions, and Hezekiah likely commissioned the compilation of prophetic traditions onto scrolls defined by their (real or imaginary) titular heads. In doing so, Hezekiah and Isaiah (or the circle of intellectuals around him) appeared to widen the blame of Israel's demise to the entire population of Israel.

The origins of pollution, purification and Yahwism

In the late eighth century BCE, it would not have been uncommon to place blame on the king for misfortune, as he was typically the direct link between the mundane and transmundane. What was radical in Judah, then, was *who* the emerging Israelite entrepreneurs blamed and what their remedies would be to purify the center and protect against future pollution. A notable shift can be detected: in the older Elijah–Elisha cycle (cf. 1 Kgs. 18–19.13; 2 Kgs. 9.5-6), pollution emanates from the kingship, much like it emanates from the president in Alexander's (1988) analysis of Watergate. This tradition posits a classic Near Eastern remedy: coup, bloody regicide and reforms (2 Kgs. 9.21; 10.19–25). This sort of pollution by the political center, followed by purification through violent overthrow and reform, was effective only so long as the center existed. With the destruction of the north, entrepreneurs needed a new formula: the polluted center had spread to the peripheries, and the only means of purification was Yahweh's wrath. This ideological shift was the core of Hezekiah's symbolic and normative remedies for the aforementioned exigencies.

To centralize and legitimate the polity, integrate a disparate population and make sense of the trauma, the Israelite entrepreneurs began selecting texts and traditions that emphasized the pollution narrative and underlined the terrifying purification process *sans* secular mechanisms of social control. The blame was to be expanded beyond the kings of the north, although they were not let off the hook. The pollution had begun with them, but the people had not listened to the prophets and thus the taint had spread to the population itself. The Exodus narrative became a clear unheeded warning: Yahweh was going to destroy the apostates at Mt. Sinai but showed forgiveness; this forgiveness was then thrown in his face first when his people asked Samuel to choose a king and then with the northern apostasy and transgression. In the process of this project, the Israelite entrepreneurs began to 'introduce a fixed text into the cult [that]

establish[ed] the national standard over against the local, and thus the primacy of the wide (and thus individual) social relations over against the local' (Halpern, 1991, p. 80). The radicality of this shift is impossible to overstate: it was the beginning of a transformation of collective responsibility to individual liability (Eisenstadt, 1986; Albertz, 1994), oral tradition to written authority (Schniedewind, 2004; van der Toorn, 2007) and syncretic polytheism to monolatry or henotheism (Smith, 1987 [1971]; Lang, 1983).[6]

As evidence of this shifting blame, consider the prophet portrayed as most zealously committed to Yahweh: Hosea. He begins by addressing the people – a trait, incidentally, not found among Near Eastern prophets (Schaper, 2013): 'it shall be said unto [the people]: "[The Israelites] are the children of the living God" ' (Hos. 2.1) and 'I betroth thee unto Me in righteousness' (Hos. 2.21). Comparing the people with an adultress who has 'cheated' on her lover/Yahweh (Hos. 2.4–3.5), Hosea (4.1) points to the source of their pollution: 'there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land', and they must be 'destroyed [for having] rejected [this] knowledge' (4.6); 'the more [the Israelites] sinned against Me [the more I] will change their glory into shame' (Hos. 4.7). Given the extent to which the north was polluted, and the fact that existing mechanisms for cleansing were rejected or unknown, Yahweh served as the ultimate cleansing mechanism: 'human justice is specific, like a spot-remover; *divine wrath is general, fire among the flax*' (Halpern, 1991, p. 12). Hence, Hosea (3.4) 'predicts' that 'the children of Israel shall sit solitary many days without king, and without prince, and without sacrifice'.

In summary, the first Israelite entrepreneurs had an explanation for the crisis: the northern people polluted, and lacking adequate purification rituals, Yahweh destroyed them. Undoubtedly, the collective trauma had left 'indelible marks' on many Israelites/Judeans, hence the motivation to prevent such destruction from happening again. While Hezekiah exploited the situation to impose and realize his political goals, only a cynic can reject the very real nature of the supernatural in antiquity. Northern intellectuals likely found their way to the political center due to Hezekiah's pragmatic need and because they were skilled in the traditions most useful to resolving various exigencies, while zealously committed to Yahweh. Later entrepreneurs would pursue distinct projects, but two key aspects were passed from these early entrepreneurs to their descendants. First, the prophetic tradition's zealous effervescent attachment to Yahweh came to be the socioemotional anchor that allowed competing factions to reach compromises and develop hermeneutical techniques that tolerated contradiction. Even after canonization of the Bible, this tradition of hermeneutics and contradictions led to the Talmud and secondary commentaries. Second, the pollution–purification narrative became the overarching frame through which the Bible's editors selected the stories and traditions they chose to maintain.

[6] Monolatry and henotheism refer to religious systems that worship one god but do not deny the existence of other gods.

The long seventh century

The success of these initial entrepreneurs was short-lived. Hezekiah died in 686, and for the next 50 years, his son Manasseh and his grandson Amon marginalized the new traditions and their architects. Manasseh came under especially sharp attack from the Bible's writers (2 Kgs. 21), who compared him with northern apostate kings: 'he did that which was evil in the eyes of Yahweh' (2 Kgs. 21.2) by rolling back Hezekiah's reforms and reintroducing polytheism (2 Kgs. 21.3–7). The people, of course, were still to blame as 'they did not listen' to what Yahweh had commanded (2 Kgs. 21.8–9). This loss of power was not as catastrophic as the destruction of Israel, but coupled with the new pollution – the reintroduction of polytheism – it reinforced the entrepreneurs' belief that Yahweh's wrath would soon be felt if they could not regain power. This emotional response is seen in Zephaniah's (1.4) prophecy: 'I will stretch my hand over Judah and all who live in Jerusalem; I will wipe out Baal form this place'.

Sociologically, several other factors would have created endogenous pressure for further innovation and a movement to retake the center and cleanse it. First, the economic boom that began with Judah entering Assyria's economic web and continued through the peaceful first decades of the seventh century BCE created a *nouveau riche* that many scholars identify as the *am ha'aretz* (the people), the people whom prophets like Micah appealed to for material and human resources (Blenkinsopp, 1995; Liverani, 2005). Manasseh's geopolitical policies likely threatened their standard of living (Lang, 1983). In addition, as Zephaniah's words above suggest, the introduction of other temples and priests would have competition the indigenous priests' livelihood: temples were banks and competition would have been threatening.

In 642, nearly 80 years removed from the destruction of Israel and 60 years removed from the siege of Jerusalem, Amon took the throne. The time, however, was perfect for a coup, and the throne was usurped by the *am ha'aretz*, the landed rich, who placed 9-year-old Josiah (640–609) on Amon's throne (2 Kgs. 22–23).[7] A 'golden age' ensued, and some of the most radical religious entrepreneurs the world had seen to date emerged (Römer, 2000; Schniedewind, 2004; van der Toorn, 2007). The first and second waves of entrepreneurs maintained much continuity: many first-wave entrepreneurs – who had lived through the fall of Israel, the reforms of Hezekiah and the failed Assyrian siege of Jerusalem – could directly convey their experiences to the next generation.

The Yahweh-alone movement took control of the center, and in putting Josiah in power, the religious entrepreneurs appear to have taken charge. During a

[7] It is worth noting the differences in names: Amon is an Egyptian name closely tied to the sun god; Josiah means 'healed by Yah'. Whether or not Josiah was indeed Amon's son, or whether this genealogical trick was played to maintain the Davidic lineage is a matter of debate.

routine cleaning of the Temple, the High Priest (Hilkiah) supposedly 'discovers' the lost 'book of the covenant' (2 Kgs. 23.2, 21). Scholars believe this document to be Deuteronomy, and its discovery reveals the many groups involved in its invention: it is not the king but the High Priest who finds it, Shaphan the scribe who reads it to Josiah (2 Kgs. 22.10), and Huldah the Prophetess who confirms its authenticity (2 Kgs. 22.13-16).[8] Josiah became emotional upon hearing the lost law and realizing pollution was rampant. He immediately had Deuteronomy read to the elders and then the people, declaring it the law of the land and embarking on a reform program. Part of the radicality lay in the disruption the new law had on the people's physical and temporal reality, as it was different from codes like Hammurabi's. As a book of statutes, it was a prescriptive, binding 'decree of supreme authority' whose principle function was performative and whose authority *surpassed* the Near Eastern model of king-as-supreme-authority (Assmann, 2008, pp. 67–68). Sacrifice, for example, was no longer allowed anywhere except the Jerusalem temple (Deut. 12). The Passover (or Feast of Matzot), a strictly local, family-based ritual was integrated with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a national pilgrimage festival (Deut. 16.1–8). In merging the two and prohibiting local sacrifice, the people were obligated – by law – to pilgrimage once a year to the Temple to participate in the Yahweh cult (Smith, 1997). Everyday temporal and physical habits shifted to the religio-political center, and performance or enactment of law became compulsory. The new commandments contributed to the breakdown of the local cultus and to a decrease in the clan networks' dominance in conventional religious life. Deuteronomy replaced the clans' theology with a corporate religion. The citizenry was constituted as a national religious polity: it now celebrated 'the festivals at a single time, at a single place, and as a single body' (Levinson, 1997, p. 91).

Indeed, the pilgrimage became an effective means of forging and continually renewing a collective 'pan-Israelite' identity and memory (Smith, 1997). Turner (1973) describes pilgrimages as liminal rituals that replace rites of passage where ascriptive bonds become tenuous. Temporarily leaving the routines and relationships of village life separate the individual: in pilgrimage, they enter *communitas* (or the idealized, leveled, sacred social order) with other pilgrims. Rituals like pilgrimage give people access to sacred time, *illo tempore* (Eliade, 1996 [1958]); access to sacred space, where Mt. Zion and the Jerusalem Temple are 'transformed' into Mt. Sinai/Mt. Horeb (thus recreating the Moses hierophany); and 're-presents an event from a far more remote past' (Assmann, 2011, p. 3). Of equal importance, the transformation of time and space allowed pilgrims to relive the traumatic past and relearn

[8] Factions remained in the Yahweh-alone movement, as Jeremiah (8.8) appears to deny the authenticity of Hilkiah's find, asking, 'How can you say, "we are wise; Yahweh's Torah is with us", when in fact the lying pen of the scribes has turned it into a falsehood?'

the pollution–purification narrative through contact with the sacred traditions and texts and through instruction in and explanation of the law by entrepreneurs. The Josianic era's identity became one of preventing pollution through legal measures.

But these entrepreneurs exacted more than just symbolic and organizational change. There was a normative change in authority and in mnemotechnique.[9] For instance, the lost scrolls are referred to as the 'book of the covenant', a phrase used only twice in the Bible: in the aforementioned story of discovery (2 Kgs. 23.2) and in Exodus 24.7. In the latter chapter, several layers of redactions appear to alter an older tradition in which Moses goes up to Yahweh on Sinai and then conveys Yahweh's words to the people. The first layer emerges after Moses speaks Yahweh's words in traditional prophetic style (24.3), and then curiously writes the words down (24.4), calls the people to the altar, splashes blood on the people (as a sign of the covenant) and reads the words again to the people from the 'book of the covenant' (24.7). This is a major change from prophesying to elevating the written word. A second redaction in Exodus 24 has Moses going up again (24.12–18), and Yahweh instructs Moses for several chapters. Before Moses returns to the people, Yahweh inscribes the tablets with his own finger (31.18), thus extending the authority of the entrepreneurs who 'found' the 'book of the covenant' and their legitimate right to interpret and communicate Yahweh's words. Of course, the 'concern of the authors of Deuteronomy was not to explicate older [traditions] but to *transform* them [and] to forge a *new vision of religion and the state*' (Levinson, 1997, p. 15, emphasis added). In the process of co-opting older traditions and 'accommodating them to their innovations … the authors *camouflaged* the radical and often subversive nature of their innovations' (ibid, pp. 6–7). No longer were the entrepreneurs disrupting the people's routines, but it was Yahweh, through Moses, who was disrupting their lives. Purification took on epic proportions.

Hezekiah and the first entrepreneurs tried to use political reforms to cleanse the center and prevent future pollution; the second set of entrepreneurs, however, embarked on a religio-legal revolution strengthened by a *hermeneutical* (Levinson, 1997) or mnemotechnical (Assmann, 2011) revolution. Law became a weapon of purification, and the new techniques for selecting, storing and disseminating texts accepted by disparate factions would be an equally lasting mutation. This meant a level of scribal sophistication previously unseen in the Near East (Machinist, 1986), in that these scholars were exegetists and reinterpreters. The law would eventually become the canon, the rigid center, yet these techniques allowed the rigid center to be flexible across time and space. The ultimate mutation was not due to the portability of the texts, but to the Josianic era's methods and procedures for glossing,

[9] Recall, Assmann refers to the methods of storage, retrieval and communication of collective memory as *mnemotechnique*.

editing and later interpreting the text. 'The accomplishments of the authors of Deuteronomy establish an essential connection of hermeneutics to the history of Israelite religion [in that they] provided a precedent for how their own composition would itself be revised by subsequent writers, no sooner than it had won authoritative status' (Levinson, 1997, p. 22). This innovation is particularly relevant as we turn to the second extinction episode, in which Judah and the Temple were destroyed and the third set of entrepreneurs appeared within the dislocation of exile. As Assmann (2008, p. 69) notes, where 'contact with living models is broken, people turn to the texts in their search for guidance', but 'written tradition cannot simply be experienced, it has to be studied'. Hence the importance of these techniques and the socio-emotional anchor in Yahweh, which led to another radical break in symbolic innovation.

The final chapter

Following Josiah's death in 609, Judah descended into internal political chaos (Jer. 27.1–3). Once again, the Israelite institutional project faced severe internal disruption. According to Jeremiah, Yahweh felt the people were once again the source of decay and pollution: 'I wish I were out in the desert … then I could get away from my people. … Indeed they are all adulterers, a band of traitors is what they are' (9.1–2), because 'they abandoned my Torah, which I set before them, and neither listened to what I said, nor lived accordingly' (Jer. 9.12). In 597, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon laid waste to Judah and deported several prominent actors; after an uprising in 587, he destroyed Jerusalem, leveled the Temple and deported another wave of Judeans.

If Israel's destruction was traumatizing, then Judah's must have been doubly so (Blenkinsopp, 1995; Smith-Christopher, 2002; Albertz, 2003), given the degree to which the Yahwists had become entrenched in Judean political and religious life and the fact that there was no more homeland. To make matters worse, deportation threatened absorption and assimilation: 'When one considers the magnitude of the calamity that overtook her, one marvels that Israel was not sucked down into the vortex of history along with the other little nations' surrounding Judah (Bright, 1985, p. 347). The authors of Lamentations, writing in exile, expressed the shame and pain deportees felt for having failed to cull the pollution, the pain of dislocation and loss, and the fear of further embarrassment (Gottwald, 1962). Consider, as examples, the emotions erupting in torrents of poetry written for public recital:

> Jerusalem has greatly sinned, and so has become filthy … (Lam. 1.8)
>
> Her defilement is in her skirts; she did not consider her doom … (1.9)

> Behold and consider, If there is any pain like my pain, Which Yahweh inflicted in the day of his fierce anger. (1.12)

As one psalmist lamented, 'By the waters of Babylon, there we sat and wept, as we thought of Zion' (Ps. 137.1). Yet, times of crisis are often times of opportunity for entrepreneurship, as actors not only find freedom to innovate but often find sympathetic audiences and emotional motivation.

The historical and sociocultural scene

Babylon's imperial policies were different from Assyria's in that Babylon left many of its western colonies depopulated and in tatters (Stager, 1996; Stern, 2001). Moreover, although the deportees were not great in quantity, they were impressive in quality, leaving a political, economic and religious vacuum in Judah. In Babylon, these Judeans were allowed to remain together in small homogeneous villages that served as financial and administrative centers (Pearce, 2006), and their human capital afforded many the opportunity to enter into the Babylonian administration. Several sources of selection pressures emerged in Babylon that conditioned, as well as gave shape to, a third wave of entrepreneurship.

First, deportees were from high-status positions in Judah; they not only faced humiliation from losing their property, but likely shame as they would have 'felt farming *to be an almost unbearable social degradation*. This feeling was one of the roots of the "*trauma* of exile" ' (Albertz, 2003, pp. 100–101, emphasis added). Second, unlike previous entrepreneurs, they had no physically fixed space to seek refuge – they were strangers in a foreign land. Their metaphysical dilemmas would have been far more acute. Third, the social mobility afforded to these deportees accelerated the assimilation process, which would have put enormous pressure on the literati who were zealously committed to Yahweh and expanding the pollution–purification narrative.

Conversely, these three factors would provide the motivation to innovate: the people needed explanations and the intellectuals were the only group capable of providing them. Furthermore, the literati carried with them the experiences and pragmatics of political rule and the ideological commitment to Josiah's golden age – an age that would have seemed magnificent compared with the turmoil of the last two decades of Judean chaos. The trauma of Israel's destruction was too distant to constitute an aspect of lived memory, but the pollution narrative would have taken on greater certitude as Judah suffered an identical fate. As previously noted, this third set of entrepreneurs was different: they carried a more coherent tradition – they had textual and normative-hermeneutical portable texts, and a set of techniques for storing and communicating those texts. Perhaps more important than any of these factors, these entrepreneurs were freed from the political duties and religious

responsibilities that typically constrain priests and scribes – that is, they had the structural and symbolic space to be radical. And they were radical, as we shall see shortly.

The Exodus tradition – which became the mythic base of the pollution–purification narrative and served as a foundational myth for Hezekiah's political program and a source of legitimacy for the second-wave entrepreneurs' hermeneutical innovations – was flexible enough to provide the scaffolding to reimagine the Israelite community, which no longer had a fixed center. Indeed, the Exodus narrative was so flexible that two competing, yet complementary, solutions to the problem of pollution emerged. Using Knohl's (2005) distinction, we can label one strand the 'Priestly' solution and the other the 'Holiness' solution. Both played a major role in helping sustain the Israelite cultural assemblage, but the latter played the biggest role after 70 CE when the Second Temple was destroyed by Rome and the 2000 year Diaspora began. Before considering the Holiness innovations, I quickly sketch the role the Priestly entrepreneurs played.

The priestly school

Ezekiel's (40–48) work is generally cited as the foundational core of the Priestly reforms (Albertz, 1994). In exile, Ezekiel invented a new type of society in which the king and the polity were powerless (Ezek. 46.2). In his vision, the religious sphere was discrete physically, temporally, socially and symbolically from the polity and would serve as the true center of a future Israelite society (cf. 45.6; 48:15–18; on institutional autonomy, see Abrutyn, 2009). The priests, for example, found their subsistence not in the king but in the people (43.1–5, 10; 45.13–15). Lacking a fixed physical center, the priests worked in earnest to make Yahweh and the Torah the true center of the religion, making the center portable across distances.[10] In the process of inventing the perfect religious society, Ezekiel also sought to resolve the internal conflict between the urban and rural priests. The Zadokites (the forbearers of the Sadducees) would win in the short run, as they were given a monopoly over any future Temple, while the country Levites (the forbearers of the Pharisees) were given minor responsibilities outside the main Temple sanctuary and tasked with providing local pastoral services and teaching Torah to the people (van der Toorn, 2007, pp. 167–169). In a sense, the priests were radical in their reconstitution of society, but not in their solution to the danger of recurring pollution. The law and the cult would administer cleansing. But what of the second remedy to pollution produced in exile?

[10] Of course, they did imagine Jerusalem and a new Temple would be the physical center again, in the future. They were thus not nearly as radical as their closest competitors, the Holiness writers.

From the Real to the Immemorium

In exile, a second remedy to pollution emerged; one that would radically re-center the religious sphere and more efficaciously penetrate the realities of the people. This Holiness solution complemented the work of the priestly entrepreneurs, which is perhaps why the two groups were able to tolerate each other and why the Hebrew Bible reflects the contradictions in their programs. The Holiness entrepreneurs sought to impose the traumas of the past in rituals meant to (i) reenact the Babylonian exile and instill feelings of bitter disappointment, horror and renewed hope, (ii) remind ritualists of their responsibility to the Jewish community's continued purity, (iii) impart a personal soteriology that meant one's own purity was as essential to liberation and salvation as the community's; and, latently, (iv) make sense of a decentered religious sphere that was hitherto unimaginable.

Decentering religion

A striking change began: as the Torah was the center of the priestly entrepreneurs, Yahweh increasingly became the ultimate center of other exilic entrepreneurs – that is, monolatry gradually gave way to monotheism. Nowhere is this more clearly seen then in Deutero-Isaiah:[11] Yahweh is suddenly the 'God from of old, Creator of the earth from end to end' (Isa. 40.27); 'I am the first and I am the last, and there is no god but Me' (44.6). Without a fixed center for sacrifice or pilgrimage, and with a singular deity of omnipotent and omnipresent power, new ritual methods were needed for forging a collective identity and purifying the new center. Yet, however radical the transcendental monotheism was, it was the shift in the pollution narrative that had far-reaching consequences. Having once been blamed on kings and priests, and then collectively on the people, the blame for pollution was now cast on the individual:

> Behold, all souls are Mine, as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine; the soul that sinneth shall die. (Ezek. 18.4)

In addition, ancestors' sins did not transfer automatically to their sons:

> the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father with him, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son (18.20). … There I will judge you, O house of Israel, *every one according to his ways, saith the Lord Yahweh*. (18.30)

[11] The book of Isaiah is conventionally differentiated by its three different 'authors'. The second writer, Deutero-Isaiah, compiled Chapters 40–54 and was given his name because he was second and due to the close textual relationship between his writing and the Deuteronomistic writers.

Salvation, too, became personal, introducing the notion of personal responsibility in both purification and individual sin. Deutero-Isaiah (Chapter 55) illustrates this new logic (Smith, 1997:129 ff.). In Chapter 55, Yahweh promises to provide a road that will lead to the festival meal (vv. 1–5) if 'the wicked give up his ways, the sinful man his plans, Let him turn back to the Lord, and He will pardon him'. Following the law will bring salvation and purification to the individual and the people (vv. 12–13). In a sense, the liminal pilgrimage ritual was reconceptualized and metaphorized as a personal journey.

Of course, if Yahweh was the ultimate center and the individual person was the source of pollution, a new collective identity and memory had to be forged in addition to a set of rituals to make these new cultural assemblages accessible. The Exodus narrative once again proved flexible: it provided the roots upon which a new foundational myth could be grafted without losing the pollution–purification narrative. The techniques for reinterpreting traditions without doing mortal violence to them certainly helped. Like the Israelites in Exodus, every deportee in Babylon was responsible for polluting, but just as at Mt. Sinai, Yahweh chose to spare the lives of the Judean deportees to teach them a lesson, allow them to enter into a new covenant and (eventually) return them back to the promised land where they would live by Yahweh's laws and 'know' Yahweh. Of central importance was that the 'Exodus and the revelation on Mount Sinai as Israel's central images of origin rested on the principle of extraterritoriality' (Assmann, 2011, p. 180): the pre-monarchical Yahweh had no home but instead traveled with the Israelites. Once the ark was built, Yahweh became a mobile god traveling in the hearts and minds of every Israelite who 'knew' him (and his laws). Once again, the Holiness project overlapped with that of the priestly entrepreneurs, which was clearly advantageous: the center was Yahweh and the individual, but it was also the torah (or oral teachings) and Torah (written law). Yahweh dwells within the revealed word: the words the Deuteronomists 'found', which were written by Moses and then re-written by Yahweh, and which created a covenant.

In theory, of course, this reconfiguration was perfect. In practice, however, the Holiness entrepreneurs had to find a mediating mechanism for an abstract, transcendent Yahweh and a self-interested individual. The absence of a fixed political and religious center led to the emphasis on the family (and, especially, the paterfamilias). If the monotheistic Yahweh and the Exodus narrative were their greatest symbolic innovations, the rituals to immerse oneself in the new collective identity and the elevation of the family were their greatest organizational innovations. Ever since the rise of the first states in Mesopotamia, China and Egypt, state and local religion were entwined but relatively independent. The family became the mechanism of interpenetration. For instance, the Passover pilgrimage, which had been removed from the family and made a state-run pilgrimage in the seventh century BCE, returned to being a family-centered ritual (Ex. 12.3, 8, 43). The onus fell on the father to tell his sons the story, educate his

family, and teach them the laws (cf. Deut. 6.7). This meant each father had to be educated and literate, an adaptation that would prove essential to the survival of Judaism. Thus, the charter myth legitimating the kingship of Hezekiah, and later the authority of the Josianic reforms, became the charter myth of a personal bond between Yahweh and each Israelite family and individual person.

Post-exilic Israel and struggle for hegemony

The evolutionary process continued, to some degree, from the end of the exile up to today. Focusing closely on those 2000 years is beyond the scope of this article, but we can draw some conclusions showing the impact the pollution–purification narrative has on contemporary Jewry. For the most part, the evolutionary process during this period was gradual compared with the rapid transformation delineated above. Two major signposts stand out: the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE) and the eventual splitting of Jews into Ashkenazi (European) and Sephardic (Arab) assemblages. Besides these major events, much of the foundational aspects of Judaism were laid during and right after exile (Blenkinsopp, 2009). By no means should this understate the variation across communities and time; rather, I highlight the adaptive nature of the Jewish assemblage. The following section examines the shift in authority from priests to Pharisees to Rabbis, and then how purification rituals reenact and represent the entrepreneurs' experiences.

The second Commonwealth

The Priestly and Holiness solutions to the exiles' dilemmas complemented each other, which is why both were retained when the exile ended in 536 BCE. But, as with all Near Eastern states, control over the temple meant control over the religious sphere. Hence, rebuilding of the Temple meant the priestly strata became the dominant group as the pilgrimage rituals were institutionalized anew. It comes as no surprise that the dedication of the newly reconstituted Second Temple (and, thus, the religious community itself) involved Ezra reading the Torah aloud to the people and, on the fourteenth day of the first month, celebrating the Passover (Ezra 6.19) to ritually purify themselves (6.20) from 'the uncleanliness of' the apostate nations (6.21). Indeed, for as long as the Second Temple existed, the three annual pilgrimages commemorated and reinvigorated the Exodus (Smith, 1997): Passover as the liberation theology exalting Yahweh as the singular supernatural force in the world; Shavuot, or the Feast of Weeks, happened 7 weeks after Passover and commemorated the hierophany at Mt. Sinai in which the Torah was given to the people; and 'Sukkot evoked the forty-year sojourn in the wilderness (Lev. 23.39–43; Neh. 9.13–18)', as the people were to 'treat their [constructed *sukkahs* – or "booths"] as their main homes for the seven day feast' at the reconstructed Jerusalem Temple (Smith, 1997, p. 66). The exile had given the Levites control over local administration of the cult, however, which meant the pollution narrative

and the Exodus myth were operating, for the first time, on both the national and the community–family–individual level. The struggle for cultural hegemony can be seen in the evolution of rituals surrounding the Exodus myth and the re-presenting of the pollution narrative.

For the next few centuries, the priestly and holiness entrepreneurs (and, from evidence like the Dead Sea Scrolls, other factions) coexisted peacefully yet uneasily. The new Judah reflected Ezekiel's vision for the most part, as Persian politics were tolerated beside Judaic religious freedom. Evidence suggests that the pilgrimages were popular and that most of the laity either disobeyed or did not know the laws very well until the Common Era (Knohl, 2005). With Hellenization, the Israelite's new religious identity came under threat from an alien culture. In the second century BCE, Antiochus IV banned observation of Jewish laws in Judah and 'profanated' the Jerusalem Temple, which led to the only true politicization of Israel during the Second Commonwealth: the Maccabean revolt. Not surprisingly, this revolt by a small group of dissidents to restore and cleanse the temple has become one of the more popular holidays in the United States: Chanukah. By the Roman era, the factions had hardened into the priestly class (Sadducees) and the local Levites (Pharisees). The Pharisees, who were likely descendants of the country Levites and were antecedents to Rabbis, had gained an unintentional advantage over the centralized priesthood. Charged with pastoral care and weekly Torah teaching, each Pharisee was likely close to the laity. Moreover, while 'Pharisee [ritual law] set very strict laws of purity and impurity', during the annual Pilgrimages they relaxed these laws and declared *all* people who participated in the pilgrimage pure (Knohl, 2005, p. 215). In essence, they made the sacred accessible to the people, forming a 'profound bond … between the Temple, [Pharisees,] and the people'. Against the wishes of the priests, the Pharisees made visible numerous holy objects from the sanctuary. The Pharisees' deep bond with the people and their apolitical attitude would serve them well: they eventually became the Rabbinate and the decentralized heads of religious communities throughout the 2000-year Diaspora.

When a group of zealots revolted against Roman rule, Rome came down hard, destroying the Temple in 70 CE and, in the process, wiping out many of the rival factions. The Pharisees survived. In 135 BCE, some Jews led the Bar-Kochbah rebellion, which was crushed by Hadrian and led to the mass expulsion of Jews from Israel and Jerusalem and into the Near Eastern/Asian, North African and pre-European world. For the next 2000 years, Jews would be without a political territory, under periodic and sometimes constant threat and duress, and dependent on the local communities they found themselves among.

Each community uniquely adapted to its local milieu – for example, during Passover, Sephardic Jews (that is, Jews in Arab countries) are allowed to eat rice because it was a matter of survival throughout the Common Era, whereas Ashkenazi (that is, European) Jews are prohibited all grains. Yet the Exodus,

Torah and recentered family–individual Judaism remained central to all communities. That the Passover *Seder*, reenacting the Exodus story, remained the central festival of Jewish communities far and wide for the last 2000 years of Diaspora can be found in the writings of the Greek Jewish historian Josephus, the great Jewish philosopher of the middle ages Maimonides, and the histories of Jews in various communities who were subjected to all sorts of horrific reactions during Passover (for example, Russian citizens routinely harassed Russian Jews during Passover in the early 1900s). Perhaps the most telling example can be gleaned from the Beta Israelis: in the 1970s, a 'lost' group of Jews was found in Ethiopia in the mountains and airlifted to Israel. Not surprisingly, the Torah was the center of Beta Israelite law, Passover and other holidays continued to be celebrated, and the dietary laws found in Leviticus were enforced (Kaplan, 1995). Even a group separated for at least a millennia from a broader Jewish community shared the same basic cultural memory. These and other rituals continue to reenact the pollution narrative for Jews throughout the world. Improved transportation and communication technologies have homogenized the orthodox version of Judaism, further imposing a shared sense of community.

The Exodus realized

As of 2013, 70 per cent of American Jews report celebrating the Passover *Seder* (PEW, 2013), a number only surpassed by those celebrating Chanukah. '*Seder* night not only repeats the ceremony of the previous year by following the same ritual but also *re-presents or "presentifies" an event from a far more remote past: the Exodus*' (Assmann, 2011, p. 3, emphasis added). Although detached from the fixed center, the pilgrimage idea still permeates the holiday: every *Seder* ends with participants saying, 'Next Year in Jerusalem!' Note that a majority of Diasporic Jews continue to see the *Seder* as the central holiday celebrating the cultural memory constructed 2000 years prior. The pain and shame lived by the original entrepreneurs is transferred into a story of slavery, in which participants eat *maror* (bitter herbs, typically horseradish), which symbolizes the bitterness of slavery, and *charoset* (apples with nuts, wine and cinnamon), which represents the bricks and mortar used in the construction of the pyramids. The pain is transferred into a liberation theology that ends with Yahweh and his prophet Moses leading the people on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In liminal space, they grumble and show little love for Yahweh's efforts, and upon Moses giving them the law, they pollute through apostasy; yet, Yahweh still forgives, and upon reaching the Holy Land the loose tribes are reaggregated into a new collective identity and memory. That 70 per cent of American Jews still celebrate this holiday tells us that most Jews learn and internalize the narrative, as the holiday cannot be commemorated without retelling the story from the Haggadah and, most likely, discussing it around the table.

Weekly and daily rituals

The *Seder* is not the only example demonstrating the efforts these entrepreneurs and their descendants employed to inscribe the pollution narrative onto the everyday lives of the people. Once the Second Temple was destroyed, collective memory became increasingly acute as the need arose for new cultural pragmatics linking everyday reality to the sacred. To prevent absorption of the deportee community into Babylon, exiled entrepreneurs needed to construct new ritual links. Without a central site for sacrifice and pilgrimage, new weekly and daily rituals were needed to generate the collective effervescence and conscience necessary to sustain the community and purify the center.

First, the Sabbath became a *confessional sign* of the communion between each family and Yahweh (Ezek. 20.12; Ex. 31.13, 17). Yahweh became the center of each family, and working on the Sabbath (or not keeping any of the other prohibitions) was made punishable by death. The Sabbath is closely tied to the Exodus story because it is one of the main commandments. The Sabbath would become a key protective mechanism, as several of its prohibitions ensured continuity and solidarity. For one, many of the prohibitions – for instance, against driving on the Sabbath – force modern Jews to live in close quarter with each other, invariably imposing the synagogue as the educational, religious and social center. In addition, the Sabbath is a mini-liminal pilgrimage that weekly disrupts the physical and temporal rounds of everyday life. The people are to be separated from their daily activities – for example, work – on Friday sundown; they enter into *communitas* first with their family Friday night, and then with the larger community at synagogue on Saturday morning. In synagogue, the Ark is opened and the Torah displayed and read from; after dinner on Saturday, each person is re-aggregated back into the community, purified and revivified. Like the pilgrimages led by Pharisees, the Sabbath brings the whole community in contact with the center of the religion – the Torah scrolls, Yahweh, who travels with the ark (which is the center of every synagogue), and the law. In many synagogues, when the Ark is opened on Saturdays, the Torah is marched up and down the aisles, and congregants are allowed to touch the scrolls with their prayer books or tallit; they kiss the book or tallit, as if they are communing with the sacred itself.

Second, several invented or newly emphasized daily rituals – three of which are discussed below – were meant to provoke remembrance of aspects of the Exodus (and, therefore, the Exile), while ensuring individual purification. First, the ritual of *tzitzit*. During Josianic times, and perhaps after, priests wore shawls that had blue and white fringes and an inscription reading 'Holy to the Lord' (Ex. 28.36). During the exile, the Holiness entrepreneurs commanded *all* men to put the *tallit* or *tzitzit* on daily (Num. 15.38). The great Jewish theologian Maimonides believed it was a commandment on par with the Sabbath and keeping kosher and was central to daily reminders of religious obligation (Schniedewind, 2004). The daily tradition continues today among Orthodox and Hasidic Jews around the world; Reform and Conservative Jews put *tallit* (prayer shawl) on when

entering the synagogue on holy days, reading the inscription 'holy to *your* God' (Num. 15.40) and kissing the inscription. Daily or weekly rituals controlling clothing impose a 'general syntax' or 'generative grammar' on those instructed to wear them (Connerton, 1989, p. 32); in this case, wearing *tallit* is linked with remembrance of Yahweh's omnipresence and one's commitment to striving to remain pure.

The morning ritual in which men wrap a leather strap (*tefilin*) around their arm and head in a prescribed way before reciting morning prayers functions in much the same way. Although scholars believe the practice emerged during Talmudic times, suggesting a rabbinical origin, it has its roots in four lines closely tied to Exodus and the invention of a personal soteriology (Ex. 13:9; 13:16; Deut. 6:8; 11:18). This daily ritual 'shall be a sign upon your hand … for with a mighty hand did the Lord bring us forth out of Egypt' (Ex. 13:16), and the boxes that touch one's hand and head satisfy Yahweh's command in Deuteronomy (11.18) to 'put [the shema] of mine on *your heart and on your soul*; and you shall tie them upon your arms, and they shall be as *totafot* between your eyes'. The *shema* is the holiest prayer, proclaiming Yahweh's omnipotence and singularity: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God; the Lord is one'. Jewish men are to wake every morning and partake in rituals meant to *pull them toward the new center of religious gravity*, their self and Yahweh, where they literally immerse themselves in sacred time, communing with the sacred in their own home.

Finally, the dietary proscriptions, or Kashrut, became – like the Sabbath – a practical problem that served to protect the purity of the community *vis-à-vis* 'the filthy' people (Deut. 14; Lev. 11), while also inscribing the imperative for personal purity. On the one hand, the complications posed by keeping one set of dairy kitchenware and another set of meat kitchenware thrust the implicit and explicit notions of pollution into the most basic subsistence activity – eating – and the most central facet of family life – meals. On the other hand, Jews would need to live near a kosher butcher and market and, until contemporary times, kashrut made eating out of the home difficult. Keeping kosher remains steadfast in Israel, but it has become less prominent in many American Jewish communities. The contemporary difficulties American Jews face in keeping kosher underscore the difficulties faced by the Israelites in exile and those thrust out of Jerusalem after the Second Temple was destroyed. Threats of pollution are everywhere, and these rituals (as well as several others) purify the self, the family and the community.

The paterfamilias

The renewed importance of the family and the elevation of the *paterfamilias* further advanced the entrepreneurs' goals by expanding personal soteriology to a family soteriology and making the family a mediating mechanism between person and community. 'The crisis of the exile signified a crisis in faith in Yahweh. … This crisis explains the insistence in Deuteronomy on the teaching of the history of Yahweh with Israel as well as the central role the writer assigns *paterfamilias* in

this transmission of knowledge' (Römer, 2000, pp. 120–121). At four points in the Torah, fathers are told they are responsible for retelling and teaching the Exodus story (Deut. 6.10; Exod. 12.26, 13.8, 13.14). These four commands are inscribed in the Midrash of the Four Sons, or what became the basic elements in the Passover *Seder* tradition of the 'four questions. The youngest *Seder* participant reads or sings each child's question – the clever, the bad, the simple and the child that does not yet know how to ask questions. Each question revolves around the meaning of the Exodus for contemporary participants, focusing tacitly on notions of individual and collective identity (Assmann, 2011). In addition, these questions become teaching moments as the paterfamilias leads the Seder, answers the questions with greater explanation or homily and provides a moment of reflection for all participants. *Seders* explicitly and implicitly inscribe the myth and narrative onto participants: each person is expected to be literate, as responsibility for reading portions of the *Haggadah* often rotates around the table. In short, the family became 'an indispensable vehicle for religion, and since then had been prepared for by wave after wave of enlightening theological education' (Albertz, 1994, p. 411).[12]

Final Thoughts

Three waves of entrepreneurship resulted in symbolic, normative and organizational innovations, which focused on pragmatic and metaphysical problems faced by real collectives in the face of potential cultural extinction. In the end, the discontinuities between each wave were overshadowed by (i) the zealous attachment to Yahweh (who became the omnipresent center of the religion); (ii) legal prescriptions (which were made portable in the text) that sustained the individual's, family's and community's purity in the face of foreign threats of defilement; (iii) continued reliance on a flexible foundational myth (the Exodus) and a strong belief in the terrifying consequences of pollution (total destruction of the most important material and spiritual things); and (iv) a set of hermeneutical techniques that paradoxically allowed for a rigid center and a malleable method for reinterpreting the foundational myth and pollution narrative depending on historical and sociocultural conditions. The embedding of the pollution narrative into the text and the selection criteria for choosing traditions, redacting them and communicating them was central to the Jewish people's survival, but the inscription of the foundational myth and pollution narrative into annual, weekly and daily rituals proved most adaptive. The Jewish people and their assemblage

[12] Another example of the father's (and family's) role is the circumcision ritual, which may have old roots (Josh. 5.2-9). It became the father's responsibility (Gen. 17.10), making him accountable for symbolically passing on the covenant from himself to his son—and, metaphorically, making a covenant between himself and his son.

have persisted over two millennia because, in part, their cultural memory and identity remained persistently accessible. The fear of pollution and need for purity was a constant background feature; the individual's salvation was tantamount to the community's well-being, and each family became responsible for each member and for each other. Even today, these innovations remain at the heart of Judaism, regardless of the sociocultural or political context.

These rituals not only prohibited interreligious contact, but they routinely immersed the laity into sacred time and space. The Sabbath and other holidays disrupted people's everyday activities and social relationships. Moreover, the emphasis on the family's (and father's) responsibility in keeping individual members purified, ensuring continuity from generation to generation and consecrating the covenant in circumcision and Sabbath rituals transferred the diffuse, vague community responsibility into a personal–familial soteriology. To be sure, at no point were these innovations inevitable, nor were they guaranteed to be adaptive. Indeed, as noted earlier, when the Israelites returned from exile, many of these innovations would have been less relevant than the rebuilding of the Temple and the recentralization of the cult. It was only with the second Diaspora that the exilic entrepreneurs' innovations – and those sustained from previous entrepreneurs – became tested and fit. It remains an open question whether that particular cultural assemblage would have survived a sustained Israelite state – that is, had Rome not destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. And it remains an open question whether this assemblage would have fit any other circumstances.

More generally, this analysis expands Alexander's cultural sociology and supplements evolutionary theory. The omission of cultural changes, contingency and group-level selection has led to theories of religious and sociocultural evolution that take for granted the inevitability of outcomes or resort to old functionalist theorizing that emphasizes individual or societal needs or requisites. Judaism's evolution was not a linear process – many aspects had continuities, yet three different sets of entrepreneurs carried the traditions and changed them. Two distinct extinction episodes put enormous pressure on the institutional projects and their carriers, casting into doubt the sustainability of this cultural assemblage. And several contingencies, beyond the control of the Israelite entrepreneurs and their descendants, were vital to the evolutionary process. In fact, one could argue that the very assemblage as we know it today *depended* on Rome's decision to destroy the Second Commonwealth. Moreover, every entrepreneur had their own interests and conditions constraining them, showing the process was not unilinear by any means. Hindsight makes the story appear coherent and ordained, but we cannot forget the contingencies that drove the process – a process relevant for examinations of how contemporary societies evolve.

Indeed, Durkheim long ago recognized what makes a cultural assemblage survive: the co-presence of people acting in stereotyped ways in mundane and sacred times and places such that strong attachments to each other, the group and the past are made possible. Alexander elaborates this idea, noting that one of the

strongest rituals is the pollution–purification process because it excites the moral community to collective action and shared emotions, while eliciting a shared catharsis when purification is achieved.

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