The Exodus as negotiation of identity and human dignity between memory and myth

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The rendition of the exodus in the Old Testament is an excellent example of cultural memory – a remembered past that resulted in collective memories that maintained the actuality or relevance of the past, without getting bogged down in the never ending agonising about the supposed 'historical factuality' of the past. In the Old Testament the exodus was remembered in diverging ways in different contexts and the ongoing need for identity and the influence of trauma were but two factors that influenced the manner in which the exodus was recalled. Despite unfavourable connotations it is again suggested that the exodus functioned as a founding myth in the evolving of Israelite and early Jewish identity. Such a heuristic goal will be less interested in establishing historically or archaeologically verifiable truth claims and more interested in how the memory of the exodus shaped identity and enabled human dignity in subsequent contexts of human suffering and oppression up to the present day.

Introduction

The interpretation of the book of Exodus in Africa and other post-colonial contexts has been an exegetical activity often closely related to numerous theologies of liberation.[1] Without denying the legitimacy of such interpretative strategies, this contribution will attempt to engage with the book of Exodus as a narrative concerning origin and migration formulated by Israelite and early Jewish communities who developed their own identity by reinterpreting their past.

This contribution also presupposes that the exodus narratives in the Old Testament can be utilised as excellent examples of collective memory that were crucial to maintain Israelite and early Jewish cultural and religious identity before, during and after the Babylonian exile. The focus on collective memory enables the reader to maintain a serious concern with what happened to believing communities in ancient Israel without getting bogged down in unanswerable questions with regards to the historical events alluded to in the Old Testament exodus narratives.

It will also be argued that the reinterpretation of the history of Israel can be informed by recent studies on the role of, as well as renewed attention to, the much maligned concept of myth. In conclusion, attention will be given to how human dignity plays an important role in the ongoing negotiation of identity up to the present.

Exodus as memory[2]

To remember is at the same time one of the most characteristic and most puzzling of human abilities. Studies concerning memory in biblical studies emerged during the past two decades as a significant new trend, but it remained a relatively underdeveloped field of research.[3] David Carr (2005) argued that the texts of the Old Testament were formed in an oral-written context where the custodians of the literary tradition used texts to memorise certain traditions seen as going back to antiquity, holy and divinely inspired.

The exodus as foundational memory is presupposed by most of the law, ritual and theological ethics found in the Bible.[4] Instead of continuing the longstanding and largely fruitless debate on

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1. Severino Croatto (1981), Michael Walzer (1984), George Pixley (1987) and Jesse Mugambi (1995) are only a few examples of scholars who reflected on Exodus as a text concerned with liberation in North and South America as well as Africa.

2. Northrop Frye (1982:32, 224) considered the Bible to be a 'gigantic myth' to escape the false distinction between 'history' and 'story', as if the first was equal to 'fact' and the second to 'fiction.' He (1982:32) distinguished 'two parallel aspects' with regards to the concept of 'myth': '[A] story that is poetic and is recreated in literature' and as a 'story with a special function ... a program of action for a specific society.' It is interesting that even the Bible as canon is according to Frye (1982:33–34) a collection of related myths that functioned as an important means to maintain the identity of a culture's identity (Chapman 2000:88–91).

3. Jan Assmann (1997), Joseph Blenkinsopp (2004), Philip Davies (2008), Ronald Hendel (2001), Mark Smith (2002) and Yosef Yerushalmi (1989) are some of the scholars who recently made use of memory studies to engage with traditions about ancient Israel's past. Jan Assmann (2011:5–6) identified four areas in recent memory studies: mimetic memory (codification of actions like customs and manners), memory of things (from household items like crockery and furniture to ploughs and chariots), communicative memory (communicating with others predominantly by means of language), and cultural memory (a combination of the first three in events like rituals and feasts).

4. Yair Zakovitch (1991) and Karel van der Toorn (2001) made important contributions with regards to the exodus as a foundational myth that impacted on Jewish identity for many centuries and even millennia.

the historicity of the exodus events, either opting for its historical accuracy or consigning it to the realm of folk tradition, one could investigate the exodus narratives as the product of 'collective memories.'[5]

Taking into account the pioneering work by Yosef Yerushalmi (1989) and even earlier by Maurice Halbwachs (1925, 1992), one could consider applying Jan Assmann's (1997:809) understanding of cultural memories from the perspective of mnemohistory to the exodus narratives:[6]

> Unlike history proper, mnemohistory is concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered … Mnemohistory is not the opposite of history, but one of its branches. (p. 68)

A fine example of how memory studies can be appropriated with regards to the study of the exodus narratives can be found in Ronald Hendel's (2001:608) argument that many members of early Israel had memories of Egyptian slavery and oppression and that these memories were linked to the pharaoh as a pervasive dominant royal figure over many generations and not to a specific pharaoh. This might also be a good reason why pharaoh remained anonymous in many of the other collective memories of early Israel.[7] Hendel (2001:620) concludes that the 'collective memories that constitute the exodus include the Egyptian oppression, the plagues and the towering figure of Moses.' He agrees with Assmann (1997) that the:

> [P]ast as people remember it is the meaningful past, the past as perceived and coloured by subjective concepts, hopes and fears. Memories are always selective and it is organised and embroiled according to the desires of the present.[8] (p. 8–9)

There is an intriguing possibility that earlier memories concerned with the exodus were rooted in the northern kingdom and the ten tribes inhabiting the area. Rainer Albertz (1992:215) and John van Seters (1994:72) pointed out several parallels between the narratives concerned with the

role that Moses played in the liberation of Israel from Egypt and the role played by Jeroboam as a leader who precipitated the schism between the northern and southern tribes of Israel. Both Moses and Jeroboam had royal connections; had to flee because of a penalty of death; negotiated relief from forced labour; and eventually lead the people to freedom and independence. Even more striking is the correspondence between the building of the golden calf in the book of Exodus and the construction of the two golden calves in the time of Jeroboam I (Carr 2011:477–478).

An insightful discussion is provided by Joseph Blenkinsopp (2004:1–17) of how the 'vocabulary of remembering (Hebrew verbal stem *zkr*) very often implies a specific, concrete social embodiment.' This 'social embodiment' becomes apparent in the tassels and phylacteries called *zikkaron* [commemoration] worn by pious Jews because they function as mnemonic devices to recall the commandments (Ex 13:9; Nm 15:37–41).

One important aspect of the exodus as memory not discussed by Hendel (2001) is the Passover. This is a good example of a memory that made such an impact on the memorisers that it became a formalised memory in the way in which the Passover was commemorated as an annual feast or festival. Blenkinsopp (2004:8–10), on the other hand, does discuss the Passover as a form of *zikkaron* because of the remembrance and the re-enactment of the past salvation through the Passover meal and ritual.[9]

Exodus as myth[10]

Humanist historians introduced a 'secular historical science' as early as the Renaissance that rejected fables, 'supernatural interventions' and 'pseudo-historical myths.'[11] It is therefore no surprise that the historical credibility of the exodus narratives, especially the so-called 'plague narratives', was often frowned upon during the past few centuries as a result of its prominent miraculous or magical elements: rods turning into snakes, water becoming blood, manna and quails available (almost!) on a daily basis, and so on.[12]

Against this background one can ask to what extent can the exodus narratives be considered to be 'myths' or in some way 'mythological?' If one succeeds in doing so it will probably be the last straw for those readers of exodus narratives who

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5. Maurice Halbwachs (1992) provided the initial basic sociological background, and scholars like Ronald Hendel (2001:601–622) made subsequent creative suggestions how to apply this within the study of the exodus narratives. According to Lewis Coser (1992:22–23) Halbwachs was influenced by the French philosopher Henri Bergson and the sociologist Emile Durkheim. Halbwachs defined 'collective memory' not as a given 'but rather as a socially constructed notion' because it presupposed that 'every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time.' 'Collective' or 'group memory' therefore exist outside or beyond the individual and is in fact determinative for any individual understanding of the past because the latter is inevitably related to this group consciousness. Special attention should be given to the way Halbwachs (1992:84) described 'religious collective memory': 'The ancient history of peoples, as it is lived in their traditions, is entirely permeated with religious ideas. But we can also say of every religion that it reproduces in more or less symbolic forms the history of migration and fusions of races and tribes, of great events, wars, establishments, discoveries and reforms that we can find at the origin of the societies who practice them.'

6. Yerushalmi (1989) described the tension between the collective Jewish memory (selective, a-historical and mythological in its focus on a redemptive historical understanding of the past) and modern secular Jewish historiography that constitutes almost the exact opposite of collective Jewish memory. Moshe Idel (2007:491) commented on the assumption that history has become the faith of many modern Jews and that this inclination towards history is rooted in the conception of an initial redemptive history. Is it a gross generalisation to presume that for many centuries Judaism seemed more concerned with remembering and commemorating the past than to record it in a historiographical sound manner?
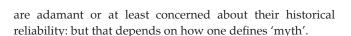
7. The pharaoh is not named when he incorporates Sarah in his household (Gn 12) and Joseph receives favour from an unnamed pharaoh (Gn 41). Adele Reinhart (1998:139–141) discusses the function of anonymity in several biblical stories.

8. Hendel (2001:621–622) decides that the 'memory of the exodus is not just a memory of historical events, but a conflation of history and memory … a story of various pasts as they converge in the intersecting lines of ancient lives …'.

9. Exodus 12:14. This topic is discussed in another article.

10. A perennial problem with the use of the concept of 'myth' is its frequent use without clarity about how it is defined. For example: Yair Zakovitch (1991:133) concludes 'the myth of the Exodus was created in order to encourage the Israelites to accept the revolution of monotheism and to believe that they make up an exceptional creation completely different from the nations surrounding them,' yet no clear indication is provided of what is understood when referring to 'the myth of the exodus.'

11. Le Goff (1992:191–192) also refers to the influence of the Reformation that contributed to the freeing of the historical method 'from the ecclesiastical authoritarian tradition.'

12. Dever (2001:99 & 121) is convinced that the 'archaeological investigation of Moses and the Exodus has … been discarded as a fruitless pursuit' and the whole 'Exodus-Conquest' collection of narratives 'must now be set aside as largely mythical, but in the proper sense of the term "myth": perhaps "historical fiction"… tales told primarily to validate religious beliefs.' In a subsequent publication Dever (2003:232) repeats his view that the 'miraculous, larger-than-life story of the Exodus … is best regarded as a myth … the sort of origin myth that has characterized many other peoples …'

are adamant or at least concerned about their historical reliability: but that depends on how one defines 'myth'.

In general, 'myths' are often considered by scholars like John Walton (2006:43) to be narratives in which gods are the main characters and 'mythology' a collection of interrelated narratives that explain how the gods influence the functioning of the world. The emphasis that myths presuppose the existence of 'gods' allowed many Old Testament scholars to 'rescue' their text from being a myth by pointing out its supposed monotheistic character: one of such arguments boils down to the assertion that the Old Testament contains no myths 'for a story of the gods at least two gods are essential' (Gunkel 2007:15). A much broader multidisciplinary definition of myth was formulated by G. Henton Davies (1956) who was informed by anthropology and history of religion:

> [M]ythology is a way of thinking and of imagining the divine rather than thinking and imagining about a number of gods' and thus monotheism and polytheism became accidental to the nature of myth. (p. 88)

John Rogerson (1974:174–178) initially summarised 'the different meanings of myth under twelve headings,' but almost two decades later condensed it to five points of 'broad consensus' about the understanding of myth in biblical studies:

- Myths are sacred stories set in a time different from that of the narrator(s), expressing an understanding of reality that justifies some of the institutions of the society of the narrator(s).
- Some societies are able to enter imaginatively into the situations portrayed by their myths, through the medium of ritual or communal celebrations.
- Where societies are able to re-enact their myths … the content of the myths can and does change in order to reflect the economic and political realities …
- As 'rationality' advances in a society the effective link between myths and the understanding is weakened … but myths do not disappear …
- While, in popular use, myths as fictions are opposed to history or art … (Rogerson 1992:481).

At the turn of the century Jan Assmann formulated a definition for Egyptian mythology that is probably applicable to most other cultures in the ancient Near East and which argued convincingly that myths were not only about the distant past but also explained the present reality of its narrators:

> The theme of the myth was not the essence of the deities, but rather … the essence of reality … Myths establish and enclose the area in which human actions and experiences can be oriented. The stories they tell about deities are supposed to bring to light the meaningful structure of reality. Myths are always set in the past, and they always refer to the present. (Assmann 2001:112)

In the light of the fact that the exodus narratives form part of the *Torah* ['law' or 'instruction'] one should consider the possibility that the Assmann definition of 'myth' can relate to the early Jewish depiction of the book of Exodus as '*Torah*.' Defining *Torah* as 'instruction' and not as 'law' in the modern sense of the word allows a certain similarity between 'myth' and 'instruction' to become apparent. The book of Exodus consists of both *Torah* as legal instruction (Decalogue and Covenant Code) and as narrative instruction (for example the so-called plague narratives that explain by means of miraculous signs who YHWH is and what the divine will entails for Israel as elected people.)

Narratives in the book of Exodus not only correspond with some ancient Near Eastern mythologies but in a polemical manner provide an alternative to them. It is surely not by chance that the three sections of the Ugaritic Baal Epic, dating back to the second half of the second millennium BC, corresponds with important elements within the book of Exodus:

- The first section of the Baal Epic describes his conflict with Yam, the god of the sea and chaos, which culminated in a lethal battle when Kothar provides Baal with maces that enable him to kill Yam (KTU 1.1–1.2) According to the book of Exodus the journey through the Reed Sea is described both in prose and poetry with an ironical twist (Ex 14–15). The pursuing pharaoh and his army are destroyed by water when they drown in the Reed Sea – the water of the Reed Sea is here referred to as *tehom* (that corresponds with the description of the 'deep water') that existed before creation (Gn 1:2). Thus it becomes clear that YHWH has triumphed over the Reed Sea and that it is now an instrument in the hands of YHWH that averts another danger, the pursuing pharaoh and his army![13]
- The demand for a house or temple by Baal is articulated in the second section by Athirat who goes to El and complains that Baal is a king without a palace or like a god without a temple.[14] It seems to be as logical for a king to have a palace, as for a god to have a temple.[15] Kothar is then instructed by El to build a palace or temple for Baal. In the book of Exodus a detailed description is provided as to how the tabernacle must be constructed and these stipulations are followed by an elaborate affirmation that the tabernacle was built according to the specifications as a sacred place or space for encountering God.[16]
- The third section resembles the first part when the confrontation of Anat with Mot, the god of death, is depicted (KTU 1.5–1.6). According to Exodus the destruction of the golden calf entailed three actions: burning, grinding and scattering the remains of the calf (Ex 32:20). The combination of these verbs suggest total annihilation and is similar to the verbs used by

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13. Wyatt (1998:35) points out that 'mythic material of such ubiquity and power must have communicated complex meanings regarding cosmic management and the warding off of chaotic powers.'

14. KTU 1.3–1.4 juxtaposes Baal with no house and other gods, like El and Pidray, who have houses or temples. Loren Fisher (1965:313–324) suggested several decades ago that this complaint probably presupposes that a temple on earth can be interpreted as a micro cosmos that resembles creation as a macro cosmic temple.

15. Wyatt (1998:35) explains that the roots of this material 'appear to lie … in royal ideology.'

16. This might explain the correspondence between the specifications for the design of the tabernacle in Exodus 25 to 31 and the very affirmation in Exodus 35–40 that the construction of the tabernacle followed the initial blueprint in every detail.

the Baal Epic to describe the killing of Mot by Anat (Wyatt 1998:34–146)

Does the book of Exodus criticise existing mythology without developing mythological characteristics of its own? Herbert Brichto (1998) is of the opinion that:

Biblical religion not only removes the One God from the domain of mythology, but as often noted, it demythologizes creation itself, and this even while it echoes the constructs of pagan mythology. (pp. 60–61)

Special attention is warranted for the argument by Karel van der Toorn (2001:113) that 'the Exodus story was originally a charter myth in the northern kingdom of Israel.'[17] According to van der Toorn (2001:126–127) the exodus as charter myth enabled the state religion of the northern kingdom of Israel to become a national religion by the end of the ninth century. The reason why the exodus became so important in the northern kingdom is not because of its historical veracity but 'as a myth … invented to provide a young political entity with a powerful national identity.'[18]

Exodus, identity and human dignity

According to Assmann (1997:14) a mnemohistorical approach to the interpretation of the exodus narratives develops a sensitivity for the manner in which individual and collective identities are shaped by the reconstruction of the past. In this section attention will also be paid to the suggestions made by Hendel (2001:604) about 'how collective identity hinges on the remembered past.' Therefore comments on 'cultural memory' made by Philip Davies (2008:12) must be taken into account when he pointed out how it was embedded in 'stories about the past shared by a people who affirm a common identity, and who use stories to reinforce that identity.'[19] It would seem as if 'cultural memory' exists somewhere between 'myth' as a narrative that explains the world within a certain cultural frame of reference, and 'history', as a rendering of things that happened in the past.[20]

Jürgen Moltmann (1974:x) correctly assumed that any reflection on how the Old Testament views humanity, will inevitably incorporate thoughts about God. The exodus narratives describe how God heard and responded to the cries of the suffering and enslaved people in Egypt; how
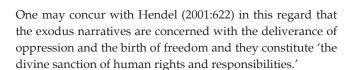
God demonstrated his power amidst the gods of Egypt in such a manner that it convinced the pharaoh to let them go; how the Israelites were rescued by God at the Reed Sea where the sea as symbol for the forces of chaos was used to destroy the pursuing Egyptian army; how the Lord revealed his law written by his own hand at Sinai and established a covenant with Israel; and how the tabernacle as sacred space was established to enable God to accompany his people during their journey through the wilderness, and so on. Sibley Towner (2005:356) observed that all these narratives reminded the people through the Passover commemoration that humankind is neither 'God's clones' nor 'miserable offenders, incapable of good.' Humankind is, indeed, both 'God's creatures and chosen partners' (Towner 2005:356).

A few examples of collective memories in the exodus narratives that have important implications for reflections on human dignity will now be discussed. The anonymous pharaoh is, according to Hendel (2001:608), the source of collective memories concerned with shared suffering and this memory generated much of what gradually evolved as Jewish identity. When a Jewish family celebrates the Passover it is done in the first person ('we remember …') and the shared foundational memory is crucial for the ongoing maintenance of a collective religious identity. Here the emphasis is less on the individual than on the family. In fact, Marcel Sarot (2001:35) makes a good case that the memories of the exodus 'define the population of Israel as one nation with one religion, and thus constitute a group identity.'

The exodus narratives provide a description of how the Israelites arrived in Egypt as nothing more than an extended family on the brink of starvation and how their identity as a nation, 'the people of YHWH', was forged in the crucible of oppression and suffering. The former slaves leave Egypt with a new collective identity as a nation under what was perceived as divine guidance and protection and this collective memory is celebrated annually with the Passover.[21] A sense of identity is stimulated by long-term collective memories and the exodus memories are conducive for establishing human rights amidst oppression and this has an inevitable beneficial effect on human dignity (Blenkinsopp 2004:8).

As a cultic image represented a god in his or her temple, while human beings, according to the aniconic religion of Israel, represent the presence of God on earth. Creation comes to fulfilment on the seventh day and, according to the Sabbath commandment, male and female, slaves, resident aliens and the livestock had to rest on the Sabbath that functioned as a *zikkaron* for the following generations. It is important to take note that the Sabbath is motivated by God's rest on the seventh day after creating heaven and earth in six days (Ex 20:11), as well as the command to remember that they were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord brought them out from there with a mighty hand (Dt 5:15).

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17. The term 'charter myth' was initially formulated by the renowned social anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1954:83) who described myth as a phenomenon that 'serves principally to establish a sociological charter, or retrospective moral pattern of behaviour.'

18. Van der Toorn (2001:126–127) and Albertz (2001:133–140) distinguish between mythical and historical charter myths in Mesopotamia and argue that the exodus narratives belong to the latter: '[W]e are dealing with a historical charter myth in the sense that one event, which happened long ago, is given far-reaching importance for present and future' (Albertz 2001).

19. Davies (2008:106) defines the writing of history in the second part of his book on the memories of ancient Israel as 'an act of recollection, and it produces what is, in form, a collective memory of the past.' He distinguishes three stages of cultural memorisation in Israel: the nurturing of different histories by the different 'biblical Israels'; the selective combination of these memories into narrative form by the biblical writers; and the reception of these memories by the modern historians.

20. Davies (2008:112) claims that the ancient Israelites intended to establish 'factual history' but that their world view embedded their recollections of the past in theologically motivated myths.

21. One should be mindful of the blunt but insightful remark about Semitic religions made by Robertson Smith (1927:29): '[R]eligions did not exist for the saving of souls but for the preservation and welfare of society.'

One may concur with Hendel (2001:622) in this regard that the exodus narratives are concerned with the deliverance of oppression and the birth of freedom and they constitute 'the divine sanction of human rights and responsibilities.'

Conclusion

One could ask whether there is an overall consistency, amidst the inevitable fictionalising diversity, in the Old Testament exodus traditions that would suggest that it presupposes the same historical event? Or should one rather be content with the diverging exodus traditions as fictionalised memories that do not allow any attempt to establish the historicity of an exodus behind it?[22]

What should a 'history of Israel' be focusing on with regards to the exodus? Reconstructing the historical events of the supposed departure from Egypt by a group that became the ancestors of Israel?: or, trying to make sense of the allusions to the exodus within the family circle during Passover or by interpreting the return from Babylon as a second exodus, in for example, Isaiah 40–55?[23]

One must be cautious not to allow the research of exodus traditions to become an attempt to formulate a grand narrative for the theological-ethical interpretation of the Old Testament! The flip-side of this comment is to acknowledge that any comprehensive historical study of the Old Testament requires some cohesive narrative that keeps all elements together.[24]

In the end we must probably resolve ourselves to the realisation that we cannot go back to the exodus itself, but that it is entirely meaningful to engage with the different ways in which the exodus was remembered. The exodus narratives as a collective memory are not past but ongoing in the manner that they are commemorated, and the way in which they still shape religious identity and enhances the human dignity of those who engage the exodus memories in the present.

To my mind the collective memories of salvation and redemption can be related, amidst many other possibilities, to the memories concerned with divine guidance (through the pillars of smoke and fire, as well as the leadership of Moses) and with divine presence (by means of the tabernacle as portable sanctuary).[25] The exodus narratives were not only about reaching the Promised Land but also with the long and arduous journey getting there. In fact, the Passover is the annual commemoration of the start of the journey and not of its conclusion. It is significant that most of the *Toroth* in the Pentateuch are given during the 40-year journey through the wilderness and are not related to the time after the entry into the Promised Land.

To the south of Israel in Egypt only the pharaoh of all human beings was created in the image of the god Horus, but according to the Old Testament every human being was created in the image of God (Curtis 1992:381–389).[26] To the north of Israel in Mesopotamia humankind was predominantly created to do the menial slave work for the gods, but according to the exodus narratives the Lord liberated the Hebrew slaves in Egypt to become his people.[27]

Being human according to the collective memories embedded in the exodus narratives is defined theologically.[28] To be a dignified human is to be part of a collective identity process generated by collective memories about a pervasive relationship with God, who is not only remembered as the Creator but also as the sustainer of creation. This ongoing negotiation of identity between myth and memory is amply illustrated by theological traditions with mythical characteristics related to the journey through the Reed Sea and the wilderness, combined with collective memories commemorated annually by the Passover, the Feast of the Weeks and the Feast of the Tabernacles and weekly by the Sabbath.[29]

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22. I acknowledge reading the stimulating article by James Dunn (2004) who grappled with similar problems when he reflected on the manner in which Jesus was remembered in the four gospels, and so on.

23. John Durham (1987:xxv) cautions all interpreters of the book of Exodus: 'What we cannot do … is provide historical information for anything or anybody mentioned in the book of Exodus. No one yet has given any convincing extra-biblical hint, much less proof, of any single part of the Exodus, of any single part of the exodus narrative.'

24. One might ponder the possibility that such an approach to a history of ancient Israel is symptomatic of a typical modernistic search for a 'golden thread' running through a historical epoch.

25. Here a note of caution is in order: narratives and myths concerning origin and salvation tend to become ideologies pre-supposing divine election, often with devastating political consequences (Assmann 2010:9–100).

26. As usual generalisations are dangerous: despite an undeniable tendency in ancient Egypt to relate the pharaoh to Horus, there are texts in the second millennium *Instruction of Merikare* that linked the image of gods to people in general. In the epilogue of the *Instruction of Ani* the reason of a human being is perceived to resemble the divine (Ockinga 1984:154; Walton 2006:212–213).

27. Parpola (1993:207) points out that King Esarhaddon is described by Neo-Assyrian texts as being 'the perfect likeness of the god' and according to proverb from the same period humankind 'is the shadow of god.'

28. Volf (2006:110) points out that there is certain ambiguity to 'the Exodus memory': on the one hand it 'is clearly one of struggle for deliverance of the afflicted', but on the other hand it seems to sanction 'excessive and indiscriminate violence to accomplish deliverance … On its own, the Exodus memory is not a fully adequate framework for remembering rightly.'

29. Therefore I conclude with Assmann (2010:14), whose particular contribution I read after the initial paper was delivered: 'This connection between, memory, identity, and time is particularly evident in the biblical myth of the exodus … The whole myth is about establishing a new identity, which is laid out in the form of a law code framed by a historical narrative.' Assmann (2011:198) points out that there are three 'festivals of collective remembrance': Passover (Mazzot/Pesach) commemorating the departure from Egypt, Feast of the Weeks (Shavuot) that commemorates the time in Egypt and the Feast of the Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) that recalls the time in the wilderness en route to the Promised Land. David Jacobson (2010:3) describes how the Israeli author Shulamith Hareven argues that myth 'can play an invaluable role in the establishment of cultural identity by providing a story that to a great extent establishes … a sense of belonging … At the same time, she believes, it is important that myths be subjected to the kind of critical historical inquiry that challenges the truth that they purport to present … The destruction of myths by enlightened historians … is reductionist, limiting … and somehow it misses important points …'.

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